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INTERNET PARSHA SHEET ON **BECHUKOSAI** - 5774

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subject: Rabbi Mordechai Willig - Blessing and Curses
Rabbi Mordechai Willig
Blessing and Curses

The opening pasuk of Bechukosai (Vayikra 26:3) lists three conditions for Hashem's blessings. The first is to walk in the way of Hashem's decrees, meaning to labor in Torah (Rashi). Like walking, learning Torah requires great effort, but allows for unending, and gratifying, progress. This is particularly true regarding decrees (chukim) whose reasons are not known (Maharal). Our efforts must be guided by the interpretations of Chazal (Rashi, 14). The second condition is to observe the commandments. We must labor in Torah in order to observe and fulfill what we learn (Rashi). To observe means to guard in one's heart, i.e. to remember what we learn so that we can fulfill it in practice (Maharal). The third condition is the actual fulfillment of the mitzvos.

The Torah (14,15) lists seven conditions for Hashem's curses. The first two (14) correspond to those of blessings: not laboring in Torah and, as a result (Rashi), not performing mitzvos. The next five (15) are: despising others who perform mitzvos, hating Torah scholars, preventing others from performing mitzvos, denying mitzvos and even denying Hashem (Rashi).

Seforno counts four conditions in pasuk 15. The first is to feel disgust for decrees, presumably because of a failure to know their reasons. The second relates to mishpatim, whose reasons are known and proper, so that disgust cannot arise spontaneously. One must intend to become revolted by them, as one who causes himself to vomit. One does so only in order to enable the third condition, the wholesale abandonment of the yoke of mitzvos. Yisrael knew that idolatry was meaningless and served idols only to permit public sexual immorality (Sanhedrin 63b); they cast away the yoke of Torah so that they could not be rebuked for their sexual sins (Rashi). The final condition is to abandon Torah and mitzvos entirely, in order to be like the other nations of the world.

If all of Am Yisrael fulfill the three positive conditions, Hashem blesses them. If all fulfill the six or seven negative ones, Hashem curses them. Our generation has witnessed both positive and negative progressions. Notwithstanding the prescient comment of the Meshech Chochma predicting disaster in Berlin-centered Europe (26:44), we cannot attribute the mixed bag of blessings and curses to particular righteous or sinful behavior. Nonetheless, we must discern historical patterns to enable ourselves and our families to benefit from the positive and avoid the negative.

The volume and intensity of toiling in Torah has increased exponentially in the post-Holocaust era. The sheer number of advanced Torah scholars, both in Eretz Yisrael and in America, is likely unprecedented and was certainly unimaginable two generations ago. Moreover, the emphasis on in-depth learning of practice halachic topics has risen dramatically, as demonstrated by the stunning output of both original and collected halachic works in both Hebrew and English. This has led to more scrupulous observance of mitzvos, thus completing the progression of conditions for blessing.

Unfortunately, some of those who have not joined the toil-in-Torah movement have exhibited some signs of Rashi's negative progression. Laxity in mitzvos performance has led to occasion bashing of so-called charedim and Torah scholars, even within Orthodoxy. Among the non-Orthodox, denying mitzvos and even denying Hashem is troublingly prevalent.

The Seforno's progression is eerily familiar. Non-observance of ritual law has led to a frightening permissiveness. Chastity and monogamy, time-honored values admired even by non-Jews, have given way to a culture of non-judgmentalism towards any action performed by "consenting adults." Jews, even some who self-identify as Orthodox, have declared that Torah law is unethical, misogynist and undemocratic. These seemingly principled statements are, sometimes perhaps subconsciously, a means to cast away the yoke of Torah. This insidious attempt to seize the moral high ground and avoid rebuke must be recognized and rejected by the faithful. The final step, to be like the other nations of the world, has led to horrific levels of assimilation and intermarriage.

We read the curses before Shavuot so that they may disappear together with the old agricultural calendar year (Megilla 31b). As we approach Shavuot, we must walk "Bechukosai", toiling and advancing in Torah, learning about performing mitzvos, and avoiding the spiritual pitfalls of our generation. Our efforts will be rewarded with blessings for ourselves and our families. We pray for a collective national effort which will confer berachos on all of Am Yisrael.

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from: Rabbi Yissocher Frand <ryfrand@torah.org>
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subject: **Rabbi Frand on Parshas Bechukosai**

I Love You and I Will Not Be Disgusted by You

This week's parsha contains the first of the two Tochachas [Chastisements] that are present in the Torah. G-d warns us about what will be if we do not keep the Torah. The curses enumerated are very graphic - and if one, after hearing of all the terrible tragedies which have befallen the Jewish people, now has doubts about Emunah [faith (in G-d)], all he has to do is read this chapter and he will realize that everything that has been warned of in these curses has unfortunately been fulfilled. Unbelievable descriptions such as women having to eat their children in order to survive are things that have unfortunately occurred in our own lifetime.

But, before the Tochacha begins, there is a relatively small parsha of Bracha [Blessing] -- what will be if we keep the mitzvos. The Torah enumerates many wonderful things. We will have plenty, there will be peace in the land, we will be able to conquer our enemies, we will become populous and prosperous -- all the wonderful things.

And then G-d promises us that He will live with us: "And I will place my Mishkan in your midst..." [Vayikra 26:11] (This is a blessing, that unfortunately, after 2000 years of not having a Beis HaMikdash, we cannot even contemplate; but it is a tremendous blessing to be able to feel G-d's holiness in our midst.) However, that same pasuk which begins by speaking of G-d placing His Mishkan in our midst ends with the words "...and I will not detest you" (v'lo sig-al nafshi eschem).

The commentaries are bothered by this pasuk; it does not seem to make any sense. When G-d is telling us how much He loves us and He is promising us all the Brochos, is this the place to conclude with the sentiment "I will not despise you?"

Imagine a fellow proposes to a girl. After going out on a number of dates, he is finally ready to "pop the big question." He begins, "I am going to love you, I am going to cherish you, I am going to take care of you..." and then he concludes, "...and I am not going to be disgusted by you either." Imagine... How far would that would get him?

That, at first glance, would seem to be what this pasuk is saying. The words "sig-al nafshi" have connotations of being nauseating and despicable! What does the pasuk mean?

I saw a beautiful insight in the Shemen HaTov. The Shemen HaTov explains that it is a wonderful thing when two people love each other. However, unfortunately, we know that when two people have loved each other and then they fall apart, there is no greater hatred than love spurned.

In general, people who divorce are unfortunately the best example of people who hate each other. People who loved each other and shared everything, but Heaven Forbid get divorced, are at war with each other. Too often, they get down in the gutter and try to destroy each other. Nothing is worse than former lovers who now hate each other.

This pasuk is saying that G-d is promising that he will love and cherish and take care of the Jewish people. However, G-d prophesizes that He Knows that they will not be faithful and He will have to chase them out of Eretz Yisroel. The Sages and the Medrashim use the analogy of a husband and wife who have to separate to explain G-d's need to drive the Jewish people out of their land.

G-d then informs us that when He splits with us -- it will not be a bitter divorce. Even then, I will never come to hate you. I will never detest you. Even when I have to send you out and we need to -- so to speak -- divorce, I will always love you, I will never detest you. This is the greatest blessing.

The Gemara in Sanhedrin [7a] gives a powerful description: "When our love was strong, we could have slept on the blade of a sword, but now that our love is not strong there is no bed in the world that is big enough to hold us both."

G-d however says, that is not the way it will be when He finds it necessary to discipline the Jewish people. He will never detest us. We will always be special. This is a special Bracha. That is why it appears in the Brochos and not in the Curses.

This write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tapes on the weekly Torah Portion. Torah.org: The Judaism Site Project Genesis, Inc. 122 Slade Avenue, Suite 250 Baltimore, MD 21208 <http://www.torah.org/learn@torah.org> (410) 602-1350

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From Creation to Completion by Rabbi Darren Blackstein

In Parashat BeChukotai, we are presented with a reality with which we must eventually accept for a successful life. If we follow Hashem's commandments, learn about and practice them, then our existence in this world will be pleasant and productive; however, failure to comply with these commandments will lead to a more difficult existence. This truth may not be readily seen by someone in his own lifetime, but it is certainly recognizable in the bigger picture. Even when we sin, Hashem is looking forward to our

repentance, as is indicated in the Pasuk, "VeHitvadu Et Avonam VeEt Avon Avotam..." "Then they will confess their sin and the sin of their forefathers..." (VaYikra 26:40). Our confession is expected and anticipated. After we are dispersed in the land of our enemies and thereby humbled, we will be remembered by Hashem. A later Pasuk (26:42) tells us, "VeZacharti Et Beriti Ya'akov VeAf Et Beriti Yitzchak VeAf Et Beriti Avraham Ezkor VeHaAretz Ezkor," "I will remember My covenant with Ya'akov and also My covenant with Yitzchak, and also My covenant with Avraham will I remember, and I will remember the land." Normally, the Avot are listed with Avraham first, followed by Yitzchak, and ending with Ya'akov. Why, here, are they listed in reverse order?

In conjunction with this verse, the Midrash Rabbah on Vayikra (Parashah 36) cites a dispute regarding the order of creation. Beit Shammai asserts that the heavens were created first, followed by the earth. This is evidenced by the very first verse in the Torah, where the creation of the heavens precedes the mention of the earth's creation. Beit Hillel maintains that the earth was created first, as is shown by the Pasuk in BeReishit (2:4), "BeYom Asot Hashem Eretz VeShamayim," "In the day that Hashem made earth and heaven." Rabi Yochanan, in an attempt to understand these two opinions as one cohesive idea, offers an explanation in the name of the Chachamim. Regarding the creative process, the heavens came first, while regarding completion, the earth was first.

Even though the heavens were created first, their completion was contingent upon the completion of the earth. The earth's importance should not be minimized, even when contemplating the heavens. The Gemara (Chullin 7b) teaches that someone does not even stub their toe without it being decreed from above. Heaven and earth are interwoven. In terms of our creation as a nation, our beginning and our roots lie within Avraham. Avraham is at the core of our inner commitment to our monotheistic beliefs. Due to his prominence in this role, he is normally listed first. However, in our Parashah, we are not talking about our creation as a people. Our topic at hand is our finishing touches, our completion as a people. This completion is contingent upon our firm adherence to Torah and the realization of the consequences that await disobedience. When we contemplate this commitment and the repentance needed from time to time, we must mention the last of the Avot first. This represents our desire to earn our own salvation, if possible. If Avraham were listed first, we would be admitting that we, essentially are not worthy of consideration and the only way we can be saved is by remembering our beginning through Avraham. By listing Ya'akov first, we are attempting to alert Hashem's attention to our latest accomplishments. The merits of the Avot will certainly stand for us, but we should not let them stand instead of us. We must take the initiative regarding our own improvement. The Avot started something wonderful, and we are the completion of their efforts.

As always, our pulse is in tune with that which happens in Eretz Yisrael. The current situation constantly presents challenges. We, surely, cannot take a back seat in the theater of our own unfolding history. Our active participation is required. The avenues are many; whether through our Tefillah, Torah learning, Aliyah, service in Tzahal, financial support, or through our attendance at events such as the upcoming NORPAC mission to Washington and Israeli Day Parade, we must try to earn the fulfillment of the promises made to the Avot so long ago. Just as the heavens could not be completed until the earth was completed, so too, that which the Avot started cannot be completed until we do our share.

from: Shabbat Shalom <shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org>

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"We The People"

Britain's Former Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

In Bechukotai, in the midst of one of the most searing curses ever to have been uttered to a nation by way of warning, the sages found a fleck of pure

gold.

Moses is describing a nation in flight from its enemies:

I will bring despair into the hearts of those of you who survive in enemy territory. Just the sound of a windblown leaf will put them to running, and they will run scared as if running from a sword! They will fall even when no one is chasing them! They will stumble over each other as they would before a sword, even though no one is chasing them! You will have no power to stand before your enemies. (Lev. 26: 36-37)

There is on the face of it nothing positive in this nightmare scenario. But the sages said: “They will stumble over each other” – read this as “stumble because of one another”: this teaches that all Israelites are sureties [i.e. responsible] for one another.”[1]

This is an exceedingly strange passage. Why locate this principle here? Surely the whole Torah testifies to it. When Moses speaks about the reward for keeping the covenant he does so collectively. There will be rain in its due season. You will have good harvests. And so on. The principle that Jews have collective responsibility, that their fate and destiny are interlinked: this could have been found in the Torah’s blessings. Why search for it among its curses?

The answer is that there is nothing unique to Judaism in the idea that we are all implicated in one another’s fate. That is true of the citizens of any nation. If the economy is booming, most people benefit. If there is a recession many people suffer. If a neighbourhood is scarred by crime, people are scared to walk the streets. If there is law and order, if people are polite to one another and come to one another’s aid, there is a general sense of well-being. We are social animals, and our horizons of possibility are shaped by the society and culture within which we live.

All of this applied to the Israelites so long as they were a nation in their own land. But what when they suffered defeat and exile and were eventually scattered across the earth? They no longer had any of the conventional lineaments of a nation. They were not living in the same place. They did not share the same language of everyday life. While Rashi and his family were living in Christian northern Europe and speaking French, Maimonides was living in Muslim Egypt, speaking and writing Arabic.

Nor did Jews share a fate. While those in northern Europe were suffering persecution and massacres during the Crusades, the Jews of Spain were enjoying their golden age. While the Jews of Spain were being expelled and compelled to wander round the world as refugees, the Jews of Poland were enjoying a rare sunlit moment of tolerance. In what sense therefore were they responsible for one another? What constituted them as a nation? How – as the author of Psalm 137 put it – could they sing God’s song in a strange land?

There are only two texts in the Torah that speak to this situation, namely the two sections of curses, one in our parsha, and the other in Deuteronomy in the parsha of Ki Tavo. Only these speak about a time when Israel is exiled and dispersed, scattered, as Moses later put it, “to the most distant lands under heaven.” There are three major differences between the two curses, however. The passage in Leviticus is in the plural, that in Deuteronomy in the singular. The curses in Leviticus are the words of God; in Deuteronomy they are the words of Moses. And the curses in Deuteronomy do not end in hope. They conclude in a vision of unrelieved bleakness:

You will try to sell yourselves as slaves—both male and female—but no one will want to buy you. (Deut. 28: 68)

Those in Leviticus end with a momentous hope:

But despite all that, when they are in enemy territory, I will not reject them or despise them to the point of totally destroying them, breaking my covenant with them by doing so, because I am the Lord their God. But for their sake I will remember the covenant with the first generation, the ones I brought out of Egypt’s land in the sight of all the nations, in order to be their God; I am the Lord. (Lev. 26: 44-45)

Even in their worst hours, according to Leviticus, the Jewish people would never be destroyed. Nor would God reject them. The covenant would still be

in force and its terms still operative. That meant that Jews would still be linked to one another by the same ties of mutual responsibility that they had in the land – for it was the covenant that formed them as a nation and bound them to one another even as it bound them to God. Therefore, even when falling over one another in flight from their enemies they would still be bound by mutual responsibility. They would still be a nation with a shared fate and destiny.

This is a rare and special idea, and it is the distinctive feature of the politics of covenant. Covenant became a major element in the politics of the West following the Reformation. It shaped political discourse in Switzerland, Holland, Scotland and England in the seventeenth century as the invention of printing and the spread of literacy made people familiar for the first time with the Hebrew Bible (the “Old Testament” as they called it). There they learned that tyrants are to be resisted, that immoral orders should not be obeyed, and that kings did not rule by divine right but only by the consent of the governed.

The same convictions were held by the Pilgrim Fathers as they set sail for America, but with this difference, that they did not disappear over time as they did in Europe. The result is that the United States is the only country today whose political discourse is framed by the idea of covenant.

Two textbook examples of this are Lyndon Baines Johnson’s Inaugural of 1965, and Barack Obama’s Second Inaugural of 2013. Both use the biblical device of significant repetition (always an odd number, three or five or seven). Johnson invokes the idea of covenant five times. Obama five times begins paragraphs with a key phrase of covenant politics – words never used by British politicians – namely, “We the people.”

In covenant societies it is the people as a whole who are responsible, under God, for the fate of the nation. As Johnson put it, “Our fate as a nation and our future as a people rest not upon one citizen but upon all citizens.” In Obama’s words, “You and I, as citizens, have the power to set this country’s course.” That is the essence of covenant: we are all in this together. There is no division of the nation into rulers and ruled. We are conjointly responsible, under the sovereignty of God, for one another.

This is not open-ended responsibility. There is nothing in Judaism like the tendentious and ultimately meaningless idea set out by Jean-Paul Sartre in *Being and Nothingness* of ‘absolute responsibility’:

The essential consequence of our earlier remarks is that man, being condemned to be free, carries the weight of the whole world on his shoulders, he is responsible for the world and for himself as a way of being.[2]

In Judaism we are responsible only for what we could have prevented but did not. This is how the Talmud puts it:

Whoever can forbid his household [to commit a sin] but does not, is seized for [the sins of] his household. [If he can forbid] his fellow citizens [but does not] he is seized for [the sins of] his fellow citizens. [If he can forbid] the whole world [but does not] he is seized for [the sins of] the whole world.[3]

This remains however a powerful idea and an unusual one. What made it unique to Judaism is that it applied to a people scattered throughout the world united only by the terms of a covenant our ancestors made with God at Mount Sinai. But it continues, as I have argued, to drive American political discourse likewise even today. It tells us that we are all equal citizens in the republic of faith and that responsibility cannot be delegated away to governments or presidents but belongs inalienably to each of us. We are our brothers’ and sisters’ keeper.

That is what I mean by the strange, seemingly self-contradictory idea I have argued throughout these essays: that we are all called on to be leaders. Surely this cannot be so: if everyone is a leader, then no one is. If everyone leads, who is left to follow?

The concept that resolves the contradiction is covenant. Leadership is, I have argued, the acceptance of responsibility. Therefore if we are all responsible for one another, we are all called on to be leaders, each within

our sphere of influence, be it within the family, the community, the organisation or a larger grouping still.

This can sometimes make an enormous difference. In late summer of 1999 I was in Pristina making a BBC television programme about the aftermath of the Kosovo campaign. I interviewed General Sir Michael Jackson, then head of the NATO forces. To my surprise, he thanked me for what "my people" had done. The Jewish community had taken charge of the city's twenty-three primary schools. It was, he said, the most valuable contribution to the city's welfare. When 800,000 people have become refugees and then return home, the most reassuring sign that life has returned to normal is that the schools open on time. That, he said, we owe to the Jewish people.

Meeting the head of the Jewish community later that day, I asked him how many Jews were there currently in Pristina. His answer? Eleven. The story, as I later uncovered it, was this. In the early days of the conflict, Israel had along with other international aid agencies sent a field medical team to work with the Kosovan Albanian refugees. They noticed that while other agencies were concentrating on the adults, there was no one working with the children. Traumatized by the conflict and far from home, they were running wild.

The team phoned back to Israel and asked for young volunteers. Every youth movement in Israel, from the most secular to the most religious, sent out teams of youth leaders at two-week intervals. They worked with the children, organising summer camps, sports competitions, drama and music events and whatever else they could think of to make their temporary exile less traumatic. The Kosovan Albanians were Muslims, and for many of the Israeli youth workers it was their first contact and friendship with children of another faith.

Their effort won high praise from UNICEF, the United Nations children's organisation. It was in the wake of this that "the Jewish people" – Israel, the American-based "Joint" and other Jewish agencies – were asked to supervise the return to normality of the school system in Pristina.

That episode taught me the power of hessed, acts of kindness when extended across the borders of faith. It also showed the practical difference collective responsibility makes to the scope of the Jewish deed. World Jewry is small, but the invisible strands of mutual responsibility mean that even the smallest Jewish community can turn to the Jewish people worldwide for help and achieve things that would be exceptional for a nation many times its size. When the Jewish people join hands in collective responsibility they become a formidable force for good.

[1] Sifra ad loc., Sanhedrin 27b, Shavuot 39a. [2] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel Barnes, New York, Washington Square Press, 1966, 707.[3] *Shabbat* 54b.

Britain's Former Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks
Britain's Former Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks is a global religious leader, philosopher, author

Shema Yisrael Torah Network

Potpourri

Parshas Bechukosai - Vol. 9, Issue 33

Compiled by **Rabbi Oizer Alport**

V'hishbati chaya ra'ah min ha'aretz (26:6)

Although Parshas Bechukosai is commonly referred to as the parsha of "tochacha" - rebuke - it actually begins with a number of blessings promised to those who observe the mitzvos properly. One of the blessings is that "I will cause dangerous animals to cease from the land." The Toras Kohanim quotes a dispute between two Tannaim regarding the nature of this blessing.

The opinion of Rabbi Yehuda is that deadly animals will simply cease to exist. Rabbi Shimon maintains that they will continue to live, but their natures will change so that they are no longer dangerous. While this appears at first glance to be a mere technical dispute over the translation of a word, the two legendary sages of Dvinsk write that the opinions of the Tannaim in fact stem from their views regarding other issues.

The Rogatchover Gaon notes that the root of the word "v'hishbati" is the same root as the word "tashbisu," which the Torah uses (Shemos 12:15) in reference to the obligation to remove all chometz from our houses before Pesach. The Mishnah in Pesachim (21a) quotes a dispute about the correct way to dispose of chometz. The opinion of Rabbi

Yehuda is that it must be burned, while the other Sages maintain that it is sufficient to throw it into the ocean or scatter it and disperse it in the wind. Rabbi Yehuda, in contrast to the other Rabbis, understands that the only way to properly remove the chometz is to destroy it to the point of nonexistence. It is for this reason that he interpreted this blessing as similarly referring to the complete and utter removal of wild beasts from the land of Israel.

The Meshech Chochmah similarly suggests that the position of Rabbi Shimon emanates from his opinions in other places. The Gemora in Berachos (35b) quotes Rabbi Yishmael as maintaining that a person should study Torah and also work at a profession. Rabbi Shimon argues that the ideal level is to spend one's every waking moment engaged in the singular study of Torah while relying on Hashem to take care of his earthly needs. The Gemora in Shabbos (11a) relates that Rabbi Shimon didn't interrupt his learning even to recite the daily prayers, as he had no earthly needs and relied on his Torah study to protect him. It was for this reason that upon emerging from his cave, Rabbi Shimon burned the first farmer he encountered due to his anger over the man's wasted time (Shabbos 33b).

We find that when a Jew serves Hashem with all of his energy, Hashem in turn protects him from the natural dangers posed by wild animals. The Gemora in Berachos (33a) relates that Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa's neighbors approached him in fear of a poisonous serpent in the area. He placed his foot on top of the serpent's hole, inciting it to bite him. The snake immediately died, and Rabbi Chanina explained, "The snake doesn't kill; sin kills." Similarly, we find in the Gemora in Makkos (11a) that Eliyahu HaNavi informed Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi that had he been on a sufficiently high spiritual level, he would have protected not only himself but his entire surroundings from wild animals in the area.

However, this level of supernatural protection is provided only to a person who spends his entire day engrossed in the study of Torah. One who leaves his studies to tend to his business affairs is left vulnerable. The blessings in Parshas Bechukosai are addressed to those on the highest spiritual level. Because Rabbi Shimon maintains that this refers to individuals who spend their entire day studying Torah, only he can interpret the verse to mean that the wild animals will still exist but will no longer be able to cause any harm.

Dabeir el B'nei Yisroel v'amarta aleihem ish ki yaflee neder b'berkecha n'fashos l'Hashem (27:2)

This week we conclude the book of Leviticus with Parshas Bechukosai, which is commonly referred to as the parsha of "tochacha" - rebuke. It is full of frightening threats of unimaginable punishment to be meted out to those who brazenly refuse to observe the Torah's laws. Each curse seems worse than the one before it, and indeed, throughout the generations it has always been a challenge to find someone willing to be called to the Torah for the Aliyah in which these verses are read.

However, it is curious to note that after concluding this terrifying and frightening section of rebuke, the parsha abruptly switches to a section dealing with the laws of "Arachin" - the dedication of the value of oneself or another person to the Temple. This section seems completely misplaced. What is the relevance of these laws to the rebuke which dominates the rest of the parsha?

Rav Mordechai Kamenetzky recounts an inspiring story which will shed some light on this question. During the Holocaust, when many of the horrifying curses of this week's parsha were manifested before our very eyes, the Germans took a particularly sadistic pleasure in torturing and tormenting the great Rabbis who served as teachers and inspiration for the Jewish people. The suffering endured by these righteous leaders is unfathomable.

In one particularly gruesome incident, a number of merciless Nazi officers beat the Klausenberger Rebbe to the brink of death. After enduring seemingly endless blows, the officers asked the bleeding and only semi-conscious Rebbe if after all of this suffering he still believed that the Jews are G-d's chosen people. He responded unequivocally in the affirmative. Amazed at the Rebbe's seemingly na'ive faith, they pressed him for an explanation. He replied, "As long as I am not the cruel oppressor of innocent victims, and as long as I am the one down here on the ground maintaining my unwavering faith in my principles and traditions, I am still able to raise my head proudly and know that G-d chose our nation."

Applying the lesson of this story to our original question, the Kotzker Rebbe explains that after reading the terrifying curses contained earlier in the parsha and seeing how they have tragically been fulfilled throughout history, Jews may begin to lose belief in their value and self-worth. As a nation, we have been persecuted more than any other people throughout the ages. Such intense national suffering could easily cause a person to give up hope. In order to counter this mistaken conclusion, the section outlining the painful times which will befall the Jewish people is immediately followed by the section dealing with the laws of Arachin. This section details how much a person is required to donate if he chooses to dedicate the "value" of himself or another Jew to the Temple. This juxtaposition comes to remind us that even in the darkest times, after enduring the

most inhumane suffering fathomable, although we may not be accorded respect by our oppressors, our intrinsic worth in Hashem's eyes is eternal and unchanging.

Parsha Points to Ponder (and sources which discuss them):

1) There is a Talmudic maxim (Kiddushin 39b) that Hashem does not give a person reward in this world for the mitzvos that he does. How can Parshas Bechukosai begin by stating that if the Jews study Torah and perform the mitzvos properly, Hashem will bless them in this world? (Rambam Hilchos Teshuvah 9:1)

2) On the blessing that the tree of the field will give its fruit (26:4), the Toras Kohanim explains that if the Jews perform Hashem's will, trees won't give forth fruits after years of growing as they currently do, but will immediately bear fruits on the day they are planted, just as they did in the times of Adam HaRishon. In what way will this blessing be beneficial, as the fruits produced during the first three years are considered orlah and forbidden not only to consume but to use for any benefit? (Har Tzvi, M'rafsin Igri, K'Motzei Shalal Rav Parshas Kedoshim)

3) The Torah specifies (27:3-7) the various values of males and females from one month to five years of age, from five to twenty years, from twenty to sixty years, and more than sixty years. Does a non-Jew also have the same "value"? (Rambam and Raavad Hilchos Arachin 1:6)

4) The Torah specifies (27:3-7) the various values of males and females from one month to five years of age, from five to twenty years, from twenty to sixty years, and more than sixty years. How is it possible that a healthy Jewish adult has no value? (Rambam Hilchos Arachin 1:13)

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VBM-SICHOT74 -33: Parashat Bechukotai

Yeshivat Har Etzion office@etzion.org.il May 12 (3 days ago)

YESHIVAT HAR ETZION ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM) STUDENT SUMMARIES OF SICHOT OF THE ROSHEI YESHIVA

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PARASHAT BECHUKOTAI

SICHA OF HARAV YEHUDA AMITAL ZT"l

Perfection of Man and Nature

Summarized by Rav Eliyahu Blumenzweig

Translated by Kaeren Fish

"If you walk in my statutes... I will give your rains at their proper time, and the land will give of its produce and the tree of the field will give its fruit." (Vayikra 23:3-4)

We may ask ourselves, what is so special about this blessing promised to us if we walk in God's statutes? After all, is it not natural – the accepted, expected way of the world – that the land gives of its produce and that the trees give of their fruit?

Before Adam's sin in Gan Eden, he was at one with the natural world; he lived in harmony with the Divine creations of heaven and earth. He was at peace with the animals of the field and the birds in the sky, without fear, and the fruits and produce of the land were laid ready before him with minimal effort required on his part. Man did not stand helpless before nature but rather controlled it in the manner of someone who held the power of nature in his hand.

Since the sin, the forces of nature threaten us from every side. Previously, there was no such thing as an animal of prey or a poisonous snake. Since the sin, nature is full of threats and dangers to our existence. Everywhere in the world man faces powerful natural forces, and it seems that it is they who hold all the power.

Since the first sin, man has tried in every possible way to reconquer nature, to remove its threats. In previous generations people used to try to appease nature – they would sacrifice their children in order that nature would not bring disasters upon them. Later on there were attempts to control the natural forces, and as technology progresses these attempts gain momentum. But despite all our progress, it is clear that success is not easy to achieve. We have indeed succeeded in controlling some of the dangerous natural forces with which we were familiar, but that has brought about an imbalance in the natural order which in turn has brought about new problems. Man's battle against the natural forces continues.

Judaism suggests a different solution – not the correction of nature but rather the correction of man. With Adam's sin the world was dragged down with him, and with his self-perfection the world will also return to its original state, wherein man will be at one with the world rather than being engaged in a constant battle against it.

By means of correcting the primal sin man will return to a state where he will no longer constantly live in fear of natural disasters. He will not sow the seeds of his new crop with trepidation, he will no longer walk about fearing wild animals. "And I shall make a covenant with them on that day with the animals of the field and with the

birds of the sky and with the creeping creatures of the earth, and I will break the bow and the sword and war from the earth, and I shall lay them down in peace" (Hoshea 2:20).

When the creations of heaven and earth truly look the way they are meant to, man will be able to come to the realization that God's wisdom is indeed revealed in all of creation. He will be able to perceive the creation about which God said, "And behold it was very good" – the living force of God which gives life to all of creation, such that everything is truly good.

If this is the case, then what reward is the Torah promising us? It would seem that what the Torah is describing is the world as it is meant to be, if only man would not destroy the Divine plan.

This is in fact so, and what the Torah is conveying here is not a promise of reward but rather a description of the natural consequences of our actions. "Walking in the statutes of God" and correction of the degeneration which has come about in the wake of the primal sin – which is our aim in fulfilling the laws of the Torah – will return the entire world to its proper state: "And they will do no evil nor any corruption throughout My holy mountain" (Yishayahu 11:9).

To date we have not yet merited this blessing in its entirety. But in the meantime we can attempt to apply it in relation to what is written in the first part of the verse, and Chazal's commentary: "If you walk in My statutes – that you should toil diligently in Torah." Sometimes a person senses that he is not at one with the Torah; he feels that he is waging a constant battle for conquest and control, and he feels helpless. A person is obligated to work towards perfecting himself, at least to the point where one battle – the question of whether or not he is at one with the Torah – no longer bothers him. A person must feel himself within the world of Torah, and within this world he can wage the battle for better and more profound understanding, for deeper and more all-encompassing comprehension. But all of this must be based on the feeling that he is "living Torah," not fighting the Torah from outside, not fighting over whether or not to enter the beit midrash. Within this embrace of life he can continue in his struggle towards perfection.

(Originally delivered on Leil Shabbat, Parashat Bechukotai 5733.)

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**Peninim on the Torah
by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum**

Parshas Bechukosai

If you will follow My decrees and observe My Commandments and perform them. (26:3)

At first glance, the pasuk appears repetitious: follow My decrees; observe My commandments; perform them. The Torah is not written in synonyms. Every word - indeed, every letter - has profound significance. How are we to understand what appear to be variegated nuances for heeding Hashem's word? Rashi explains that the pasuk is teaching us the process by which we proceed from learning to action. The combined meaning of the pasuk is: If you will follow My decrees by engaging in ameilus baTorah, intensive Torah study, with the intention that this study will lead to; observe My commandments properly, and, if you will actually elevate potential to reality; and perform them - you will merit the following blessings, which will be detailed in the upcoming pesukim.

Thus, it all reverts back to ameilus baTorah, commonly translated as toiling in Torah, or exerting oneself in his studies. Rarely has a pasuk - or actually a term, ameilus - been so expounded upon. The Jewish People, Torah and Hashem are one. If we have no clear understanding of the meaning of limud haTorah, study of Torah, then we are in serious trouble. Sitting in front of a Gemorah as if one is at a country club is not the Torah's idea of ameilus. Yet, on the other hand, we find ourselves reciting daily the blessing, v'Haarev na, "Please, Hashem, sweeten the words of Torah in our mouth." Toil? Sweetness? It would seem that these terms are not mutually consistent with one another.

A certain blessing precedes v'Haarev na, the Bircas HaTorah of Laasok b'divrei Torah. "To busy (occupy) ourselves with the words of Torah." We now have a third term for Torah study: eisak, busy ourselves. An eisak is a business. Literally, the Torah becomes our business, our occupation. The purpose of Torah study is so that we are able to perform the mitzvos properly. Thus, the extended meaning of Laasok b'divrei Torah is to occupy our minds with Torah, so that we are able to implement the words of Torah properly and correctly in actual practice.

We now know that Torah must occupy our minds and our mouths. We acknowledge that physical and mental exertion is an integral part of this process. Where does the "sweetness" enter the picture? Horav Shimon Schwab, zl, explains this pragmatically. Once we have expended the effort to apply ourselves to learning Torah, we ask Hashem

to make the Torah sweet for us. He offers a prosaic analogy to one who is reluctant to jump into a pool of cold water. Once he has "broken the ice" and made the plunge, the water is quite soothing and enjoyable. Indeed, there are difficulties in studying Torah. It does not come easily for many people. Obstacles and challenges block the way. For some, it is time; For others, it is acumen, background, study partner, indolence, every excuse in the world. Once one has made the necessary effort, and dispensed the necessary toil and exertion, he asks Hashem to please grant him the enjoyment of the learning. We ask that the words of Torah literally become sweet in our mouths.

I think that there is another aspect to Torah study - one that eludes some of us - one which is a requirement - one that bespeaks *ameilus* - and one that will certainly define for us the sweetness of Torah. Let me first cite a story which is related by Horav Sholom Schwadron, zl. One day, the Rosh Yeshivah of Ponevez, the veritable *gadol hador*, Horav Elazar M. Shach, zl, came late for shiur, his Torah lecture. This was not a common occurrence. The Rosh Yeshivah was always on time, because he loved to teach and share his Torah knowledge with his students.

Rav Shach began the shiur without introduction; rather, he began where he had left off the previous day: "Yesterday, we concluded the shiur with a difficult question. Probably, all of you were able to sleep last night. You went to bed at your usual time and you slept calmly, waking up this morning refreshed, rejuvenated, and ready to tackle the next day. I could not function all day. The question troubled me to the point that I could not think of anything else. I could not sleep. Finally, with the break of dawn, I called a taxi and traveled to Yerushalayim to present myself at the apartment of the Brisker Rav, zl. I posed the question to him, and he told me an original answer that was novel and incredible. At this moment, I have just returned from Yerushalayim to share the answer with you."

This is a preamble to understanding *eisak haTorah* and *ameilus baTorah*. Nothing else matters; nothing else counts; no sleep - nothing. If I have a question, it must be resolved. Was the Torah sweet to Rav Shach? There is absolutely nothing sweeter than the Torah. It was his life. Let us go one step further, and we will have the entire picture of what is achieved by *ameilus* and what is meant by sweetness.

Rav Schwadron tells another story. This one concerns the Rebbetzin of Horav Dov m'Yanava. She was a righteous and very astute woman. Her husband had suffered a stroke, and he lay paralyzed. She saw the doctors who were attending to him move to the side and conference with one another. She approached the group and asked that they explain what was going on, as well as their approach toward healing her husband.

One of the doctors looked at her, and, with a chuckle, asked, "Why are you so adamant concerning your husband's therapy? When your husband was speaking about a difficulty in the Rambam which he was learning, were you as determined to inquire concerning the explanation of Rambam?"

Without batting an eyelash, the Rebbetzin told the doctor, "If the Rambam was as important to me as my husband's health, trust me, I would have found a way to explain the Rambam!"

Ameilus avails one *baalus*, ownership, possession, over the Torah which he studies. Through *ameilus* he develops an intimate relationship with the Torah, a relationship that is the result of toil and exertion immersed in love. When it becomes his, when he feels the Torah is a part of him - there can be no greater or more heightened sense of joy.

Five of you will pursue a hundred, and a hundred of you will pursue ten thousand. (26:8)

Rashi notes the discrepancy in the ratio of five to one hundred. If five Jews can pursue one hundred, which is a ratio of one to twenty, then a hundred Jews should pursue two thousand - not more. Yet, the Torah states that one hundred will pursue ten thousand. This teaches that when more people are united in serving Hashem, the effectiveness of their actions increase exponentially. The same Reuven and Shimon who had earlier been pursuing one hundred are now able to achieve much more. They have not changed, but their power has, because they are part of a *tzibbur*, community/group.

In his closing remarks to *Shemiras HaLashon*, the Chafetz Chaim, zl, quotes this Chazal in his emphasis of the extreme importance of *tefillah b'tzibbur*, communal prayer, as opposed to private prayer at home. He explains that not only does one increase his personal reward by davening with a *minyan*, quorum, of at least ten men, but his actual prayer has greater efficacy. He employs a simple rationale. If a person has before him two business propositions; one which could bring him a profit of five dollars and one that will incur a profit which is quadruple that - is there any question which one he will choose?

While this thesis focuses on *tefillah b'tzibbur*, it applies equally to all *mitzvos* in which a multitude of people enhance the *mitzvah*. Furthermore, as the Chafetz Chaim concludes, the three dominant *mitzvos* associated with *tefillah*: donning *Tefillin*; *Krias Shema*; remembering the exodus from Egypt - are all embellished when a person davens *b'tzibbur*.

One's inclusion in a group can have both positive and negative consequences. In *Sefer Bamidbar* 1:49, the Torah repeats a number of times that *Shevet Levi* was not counted together with the rest of the nation. Rashi explains that Hashem foresaw that one day a Heavenly decree would be issued against those twenty years of age and above, that they all perish in the wilderness. By excluding the Tribe of Levi from the communal census, they were no longer part of the *Klal*, the larger community, and, hence, not subject to the effects of the decree. When a punishment is issued against a group, all members of the group, regardless of personal merit, are included. While there are exceptions to the rule - they are to be viewed as such.

The inclusion of an individual in a communal group likewise plays itself out in a positive manner. Thus, we find that, when Elisha HaNavi asked the Shunamis woman if she needed any favors, her reply was, *bsoch ami anochi yosheves*, "Among my people I dwell" (*Melachim* II 4:13). The *Zohar Hakadosh* explains that this dialogue occurred on Rosh Hashanah, and Elisha was intimating, "Do you seek any preferential treatment from the Almighty?" She replied, "I wish to be included as a member of the community." She did not want to be singled out as an individual. Horav Chaim Shmuelwitz, zl, explains that one who is judged as part of the community enjoys the same benefits that are granted to the community - regardless of lack of punishment.

This, comments the Rosh Yeshivah, is also the basis for the admonition of Chazal, "A person should always associate himself with the community" (*Berachos* 30a). Rashi explains this to mean that one's prayers should be articulated in the plural, rather than the singular, form. By praying for the public welfare, one is automatically included with them. Therefore, he does not require personal merit in order to benefit from his personal prayers. The reason for this, explains Rav Chaim, is that the community is not viewed merely as a collection of individuals, but rather, as a new entity exceeding the aggregate of the merits and strengths of the individuals of which it is comprised.

The incredible inclusive power manifest by the community is underscored by Chazal when they advise us: *Im paga bach menuvel zeh, mashcheihu l'bais ha'medrash*, "If this despicable (abominable) one (the *yetzer hora*, evil inclination) meets you (if he begins bothering you), draw him into the study hall" (*Kedushin* 30b). The *bais ha'medrash* is the communal Torah center, the place where many gather to study Torah individually - and collectively - all under one roof. It is there that the "despicable one" is powerless to dominate over a person. Thus, explains Rav Chaim, the best advice is for a person to unite with the community, remain steadfastly committed to being part of the *klal*, for the merit of the *rabim*, multitude, will encompass and benefit all who are found there.

Klal, community, is determined by *daas Torah*, the wisdom developed by those whose entire lives are steeped in Torah study and erudition. It takes a mind honed by Torah to develop such an acute perspective that one sees what eludes others. Horav Elazar M. Shach, zl, relates that when Horav Meir Simchah, zl, of Dvinsk, author of the *Or Sameach* and *Meshech Chochmah*, became gravely ill with his final illness, another distinguished Rav wanted to send telegrams to every Jewish community and leader to recite *Tehillim* for the *Or Sameach*. The *Or Sameach* demurred and resisted efforts at disseminating his need for communal prayer. He explained that, as long as people consider him to be part of the large communal collective, he is part of the wider community. Once his illness is publicized, and he becomes the exclusive subject of prayer, he will be judged differently. He felt that this would intensify the critical and grave nature of his illness.

The Chafetz Chaim proposes another reason for the importance of praying with a *minyan*, the incredible reward in store for answering *Amen*, *Borchu*, and *Amen*, *Yehei Shmei Rabba*, with all of his *kochos*, might: all of his sins are forgiven. Imagine atonement for all of our sins, and all that is expected of us is to daven with passion, and answer *Amen* as if we mean it.

Regrettably, we do not acknowledge the importance of answering *Amen* to *Kaddish*, and blessings in general. As a result, we either ignore the blessing, or answer *Amen* half-heartedly. Clearly, our reluctance to "do it right" is due to a lack of awareness of the overriding significance of *tefillah b'tzibbur*. The following episode was related by the *Levush*, Horav Mordechai Yoffe, zl, who went to learn Torah from a great Sephardic *gadol*, Torah leader, whose name was Rabbi *Abohav*. Once, Rabbi *Abohav's* son made a *bracha*, and Rabbi Yoffe, for some reason, did not answer *Amen*. Rabbi *Abohav* became so angry with his student that he put him in *cherem*, excommunicated him. When the prodigious student looked at his *Rebbe* with a stunned image, the *Rebbe* told him the following story which depicts the severe punishment one receives for neglecting to answer *Amen*. Perhaps if he "listened" to the story, he would understand why his *Rebbe* was exceedingly careful about answering *Amen* properly.

Prior to the Spanish Inquisition and eventual expulsion of 1492, Spain was replete with a number of holy Jewish communities. The king had a number of times attempted to free himself and his community from the Jews, but, due to the efforts of a pious Jew whom the king admired, the Jews had always been spared. Following the latest edict calling for the Jews' expulsion from Spain, the community leaders once again approached this righteous fellow and implored him to intercede on their behalf. He, of

course, agreed, but asked to first daven Minchah. They persuaded him to go immediately, since it was a matter of life or death.

The king was pleased to see his friend, and they began to talk about the decree. Meanwhile, a priest entered the king's office and immediately began to bless the king in Latin. It was a lengthy litany, so the Jew saw an opportunity to move to the side and daven Minchah. Regrettably, the priest concluded his blessing while the Jew was still reciting Shemoneh Esrai. The priest called upon all those assembled to answer Amen to his blessing of the king. Everyone responded except for the pious Jew, who was answering to a Higher Authority. When the priest saw that the Jew had not affirmed his blessing with a resounding Amen, he went into a frenzy. He screamed that now his blessing of the king would not be fulfilled, because someone had not responded with Amen. Hearing this, the king also became infuriated and ordered that the Jew immediately be put to death and his body be mutilated and quartered and sent to his home. He then expelled all of the Jews from his kingdom. Why? Why did this Jew receive such a terrible death? Why were all the Jews exiled? One of the closest friends of the deceased fasted to be allowed to know what sin it was that catalyzed this gruesome punishment. The dead Jew appeared to his friend in a dream and explained that once he had neglected to say Amen to a child's brachah. Until then, the Heavenly Court had set aside his punishment. When the priest became angry over his not saying Amen to his blessing, the Heavenly Tribunal decided to prosecute him and sentenced him to this horrible death. Rav Abohav concluded the story, saying, "I will forgive you if you will publicize the story and warn everyone to be meticulous concerning answering Amen."

In Sparks of Glory, Rabbi Moshe Prager, zl, relates the poignant story of a young boy named Shmulik. His father risked his life daily to pray with a secret makeshift minyan in a basement, in Warsaw. Shmulik, too, wanted to attend the minyan. His father flatly refused. It was too dangerous. It meant putting everyone at risk. There could only be so many people there. As the "congregation" was praying, they heard a soft knock at the door. They had established a code, which was a series of knocks. This knock did not fit with the code. With great trepidation and fear, they slowly opened the door - prepared for the worst. All they saw was little Shmulik. When Shmulik's father saw his young child at the door, he became quite upset, and he screamed, "What are you doing here? I told you never to come here! Why did you disobey my orders?" The father then proceeded to slap Shmulik across the face.

Shmulik held his own and cried out, "Will you beat me, too? Have I not had my share of blows? I, too, am a Jew. I, too, want to pray!"

I included this story, so that the next time we are in our warm beds, too lazy to get up for minyan, or at home at night and too "busy" to go to Minchah/Maariv, perhaps we will think about the Jews who, throughout the ages, risked their lives to daven with a minyan. Let us not forget Shmulik's clarion call, "We, too, are Jews!"

And he shall pay the evaluation of that day, it is holy to Hashem. (27:23)
Every valuation shall be in the sacred shekel. (27:25)

In the Talmud Arachin 24a, Chazal state, Ein l'hekdesh ela mekomo u'sheato, "Hekdesh has only its place and time." This means that, if a man makes an erch - vow, but lacks the means to pay for it, the gizbar of Hekdesh, the Sanctuary's treasurer, must assess his possessions to establish the amount that the donor can really afford. The assessment of value is commensurate with the place and time in which the vow occurred. For example, if the donor possesses a slave who is worth twenty dinarim, but when he is dressed up in a thirty dinar outfit, his value would appreciate considerably, adding one hundred dinarim to his worth, which now stands at one hundred twenty dinarim, we value him according to his original value of twenty dinarim. For the purpose of the erch, the assessment, the slave is valued at his current worth.

Likewise, if the donor possesses a diamond, which in the donor's home city - a larger city - would fetch a price of one hundred dinarim, but, in the village where diamonds are scarce, would fetch twice as much, we value the diamond according to its current time and place.

Horav Lazer Brody, Shlita, suggests a powerful lesson to be derived from the fact that the jewel's value is determined by the present time and location. What will be tomorrow or how much its value increases elsewhere is of no concern. It is the present which matters. Every minute of a person's life is an invaluable jewel which is worthy of being sanctified - if the person acts immediately. If he waits, pushes it off, claims that he will act later or elsewhere - it will be too late. This minute has vanished.

We have three opportunities for spiritual ascendancy: Torah study; tefillah, prayer; tzedakah, charity/acts of lovingkindness. Anything else, however mundane, becomes sanctified if it benefits, enhances, empowers the performance of these three. Otherwise, the mundane is a waste of precious time, the destruction and ultimate loss of a jewel whose value is incalculable. Why? Because we cannot discern the value of an individual's potential. Who knows, if properly motivated, how far a person can excel; how much he can achieve? Before one realizes what he is - or is not - doing, however, that moment is gone. It is fleeting and does not wait for us to become properly motivated or to have all

the "conditions" in place before we declare "all systems go." That "moment" begins now, and it is over before we know it.

As the Kohen is not permitted to delay exchanging the diamond with the hope that its value will increase, so, too, are we not allowed to delay in "cashing in" our personal diamond. Our neshamah, soul, is a diamond whose potential value is attained by our actions. For the most part, we know what is right and proper, how to act and what we should do. Along the road to success, however, we encounter self-imposed challenges that impede our ability to grow properly. We fabricate excuses, establishing time lines for when we will make time to learn, to daven, to give tzedakah. Hillel HaZakein says, "Do not say, 'When I am free I will study,' for perhaps you will not become free." How can we push it off until tomorrow, when we are not guaranteed that we will "complete" today?

A second lesson which may be derived from the laws of Arachin is that every valuation should be in the sacred shekel. The Torah is teaching us that our goals and objectives, our destiny, must be bound up in the sacred shekel; our assessment of anything valuable should be: How holy is it? How will this promote/help holiness/spirituality? It is not about how many material possessions with which one has been blessed; it is how he uses said abundance. Wealth which is used only for self-promoting purposes, luxury, control, arrogance - is a waste and, ultimately, destructive. Wealth that is used for kedushah, holiness - is valuable.

We should measure every activity, thought, and speech by the following barometer: What value does this have to Hashem? How does it promote increased spiritual affiliation? Will it glorify G-d? If it does not measure up to these criteria - then the action is not worth doing. Hashem has given us a body with various capabilities for one purpose: to serve Him. This is how we should evaluate our actions - indeed, our life.

Any tithe of cattle or flock, any that passes under the staff, the tenth of one shall be holy to Hashem. (27:32)

Every tenth animal of those born during the current season must be consecrated as an offering to Hashem. This is Maaser beheimah, the tithe of cattle or flock. All of the animals are put into a large corral and allowed to leave individually. Every tenth animal is marked with a dab of paint to distinguish it from the other animals.

Horav Eliezer Gordon, zl, founding Rosh Yeshivah of Telshe, visited Kiev in order to solicit funds for his growing yeshivah. He came to the home of one of the wealthiest men in Russia and presented his case on behalf of his yeshivah. He asked the man for five hundred rubles. This was an enormous sum of money, and the man pointed this out to him. "Indeed," he said, "when a fire ravaged Radin, Poland, (home of the Chafetz Chaim), it destroyed the entire Jewish quarter. The Chafetz Chaim made an appeal, and, with great effort, was able to raise two hundred ruble, which was used to rebuild half the community. Rebbe, you are asking for more than double of that sum - and for only one yeshivah! You must be joking."

The Rosh Yeshivah replied, "No, I am quite serious. I think that you are capable of contributing this amount.

"Let me explain" began Rav Leizer. "I look at everything from two perspectives. This is the way we analyze a sugya, topic, in the Talmud. There are two approaches, and we decide which one to use in order to understand the given issue. The same concept may be applied to charity: how much charity one should give; and why you and I have contrasting viewpoints concerning your ability to contribute five hundred ruble to my yeshivah.

"The Torah teaches us the process for separating Maaser beheimah, whereby each animal must pass through a narrow pathway and every tenth one is marked. What does the wealthy man who has ten thousand head of cattle do? Does he stand there all day - perhaps even a few days - marking off his Maaser? Apparently, he does. It could have been executed in a much simpler and more convenient manner by separating one thousand animals. Why go through such a prolonged process?"

"As I explained earlier, there are two ways to look at a given situation. Imagine, approaching a wealthy landowner and demanding, 'I want one thousands cows to be used as sacrifices for your Maaser beheimah. There is no question that the wealthy man will hem and haw in an attempt to bargain his way out of such a hefty sum. If, however, he goes down to the corral and begins to count, one for me, two for me, three for me, when he finally reaches the tenth animal, he is no longer troubled about giving away the tenth animal. After all, he retains the other nine. He has been blessed with so much. The experience might take much longer, but the lesson the wealthy man derives is invaluable.

"Likewise, you and I have discrepant approaches to your contribution to the yeshivah's building fund. Five hundred rubles is no doubt a considerable sum, but why not take a moment to review all of your assets? Is five hundred rubles such an exorbitant amount?"

In honor of Dr. Dennis and Marriane Glazer Peninim mailing list

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Approaching Shemithah

By [Rabbi] Yitzchok Adlerstein, on May 8th, 2014

If you haven't yet realized that the shemithah year is around the corner, you will probably find out this Shabbos. The parshah of Behar, with its early invocation of the laws of shevi'is, should be the perfect time to turn our attention to the mitzvos that will soon be upon us.

Before dissension and acrimony overtakes us – with heated discussion about which seforim are deleting references to which gedolim who supported the heter mechirah – I would recommend a fascinating book to get us into the spirit of the season. Rebels in the Holy Land: Mazkeret Batya – An Early Battleground For the Soul of Israel makes for a thoroughly enjoyable and engaging read.

Author Sam Finkel is a man on a mission. He seeks to undo the historical revisionism that treats the First Aliyah with indifference or contempt, largely because of the growth of the Old Yishuv, which was seen by later writers as nothing more than a bunch of schnorrers living on the dole of the chalukah system. The real Israelis, according to customary wisdom, were the New Yishuv chalutzim of the First Aliyah, and the progressive and more cosmopolitan immigrants of the Second Aliyah. Together they created the new Jew, freed from the tyranny of antiquated Jewish law.

Finkel sets out to explode this myth. All but one of the first twelve settlements of the First Aliyah were established by frum Jews. Two of those settlements were founded by members of the Old Yishuv itself. In chapter after chapter, we come across familiar place names that we associate with the secular urge in contemporary Israel, only to find the image of a bearded man with a hat who actually began the place.

More importantly, Finkel wants us to realize that a kind of Jew most of us know nothing about set the stage for the battle over the role of religion that remains stalemated today. He tells the story of Ekron, one of the early settlements, whose inhabitants took on enormous challenges for the privilege of building up the Land, but remained steadfast and unflinching in their determination to observe the laws of shemittah in their fullest, even if it meant returning to the Old World.

The book is equally the story of other figures – some noble, and some not – who devoted their careers or their fortunes to the establishment of a Jewish homeland, one parcel of land at a time. First among them was Baron Edmond de Rothschild, who in less than two decades spent an estimated 100 million dollars on his “colonies” that would provide relief from the incessant persecution in Eastern Europe. The Baron enticed a group of ten frum, experienced and successful farmers to leave their tiny town of Pavlovka (in today's Belarus) – and initially their families as well – to travel (together with a melamed) to an uncertain future in a neglected part of the Ottoman Empire. They founded the sixth Jewish agricultural colony in the Land, and called it Ekron. Today, it is known by the name bestowed upon it during a subsequent visit by the Baron: Mazkeret Batya, in memory of his mother. It stands just 3 miles southwest of Rehovot, and too many of us know nothing about it.

Another of those figures is Rav Shmuel Mohliver, who was transfigured by the plight of refugees fleeing the pogroms in the aftermath of the assassination of Czar Nicholas. His Chovevei Zion movement preceded Herzl in calling for a permanent presence in Palestine. Fearful of what emigration to the US was doing to undermine religious practice, he urged taking concrete steps to actualize his vision – and got the Bais HaLevi to sign on to a proclamation to that effect. (The Bais HaLevi later withdrew his support.) On Erev Sukkos 1882, Rav Mohliver presented his vision to the Baron, who hesitatingly agreed that if a small group of farmers could demonstrate that the land could sustain those who worked it, he would help with some of its costs and support.

Finkel guides us through the difficult steps in organizing the group, locating a suitable plot of land, of evading the intrusion of Ottoman regulation. He vividly depicts the challenges and tribulations of a resourceful group of Jews, and their battles with fellahin, mosquitoes, disease, and most importantly, with anti-religious middle management appointees of the Baron who were his point men on site, but detested the frum farmers and determined to break their spirit.

The donnybrook of the saga was the shemithah of 1888-89. The author shows why the stakes were much smaller in previous shemitos, making this one a crucial test case of halachic observance after the large scale return of Jews to their homeland. Finkel tells the full story, which roughly revolves around the Baron's determination to find a halachic solution so that all the colonists would not have to become wards of his largesse. We learn about the opposition of Rav Shmuel Salant and Rav Yehoshua Leib Diskin, and the limited and somewhat undefined heter mechirah of Rav Yitzchok Elchonon. We find out that the last appeal made by Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch – days before his petirah – was on behalf of those who refused to abide by the heter mechirah,

and instead fully observe the prohibitions of shemithah. We see the dispute engulf Jewish populations throughout the Diaspora. We learn about the reaction of one of the Baron's men to the perceived impudence of the farmers of Mazkeret Batya in heeding the psak of the chachmei Yerushalayim over the dictates of the Baron (and the advice of Rav Shmuel Mohliver and others) to rely on the heter mechirah: he attempted to starve them out by closing their well, and withholding services of their visiting physician.

Finkel's writing is crisp, and fast-paced. He throws in uncountable sidebars that enlighten us about life in Jewish Palestine, decades before the establishment of the State. The layout is an absolute delight. It is richly appointed with priceless photos and biographical information that make reading the book a journey to the heart of a movement, not just the tale of a frum settlement.

In the development of the story, we see two sides emerge. One viewed the farmers of Ekron as heroes for their tenacity. The other saw their stubbornness as an obstacle to the growth of a larger Jewish presence. There were great people on both sides. (Rav Shmuel Mohliver pushed for acceptance of the heter mechirah. Yet he shielded the farmers who did not listen to him from the wrath of the Baron, and incurred it himself. Nonetheless, he asked that an angry letter from the Baron be placed under his head when he would be buried, because it proved his vital role in the first steps of the return of the People to its Land.) Contrary to what some believe, the psak of the chachmei Yerushalayim was not based on their absolute dismissal of the heter mechirah. They were much more disposed towards it during the next shemithah! According to R Yechiel Michel Tukachinsky, the strong opposition in 1888 was born of the conviction that if those returning to the Land would be fully faithful to the laws of shemithah at the first major opportunity, Hashem's bracha would undoubtedly follow. Because so many failed to avail themselves of this opportunity, they would not rely on it in the future, and were thus more inclined to rely on an acceptable halachic leniency during the next shemithah.

The farmers weathered the shemithah storm of 1888, but soon were forced to submit to the strong-armed rule of the Baron's appointees in a way that broke their spirit. Their community survived – but not its commitment to halachah. What changed the course of Mazkeret Batya was the chinuch provided by Haskalah secularists, that gradually won away the young people. The countermeasures by the frum communities of the Land was too little, too late. It took 20 to 30 years, but eventually the residents of Mazkeret Batya were distanced from the halachic legacy of their ancestors. What did not change through repression did succumb to inadequate response to the challenge of modernity.

The book is full of marvelous vignettes of familiar and less familiar personalities. One that stands out is an interview of Rav Shmuel Salant by James Creelman, a non-Jewish journalist who met with the undisputed gadol of Yerushalayim for some 70 years. Creelman was extremely taken in by Rav Salant. His real goal was investigating the massacre of 20-30,000 Armenians http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adana_massacre in April 1909 by Turkish Muslims, and he asked the gadol for his reaction.

The grand rabbis seemed to be deeply troubled. “It was dreadful,” he said. “I sent a hundred francs to the Christian relief committee as soon as I heard of it. It was not much, but it was all I could spare, for I am a poor man. I hope that nothing like this will ever occur again in the world.”

When he asked Rav Salant about the movement to establish a Jewish nation in Palestine, he replied:

The Jews should return to Palestine. That is the best thing for them. There never was a better time in history for Jews to return to their own land.

The book was a joy to read, even if it was bittersweet, rather than sugar-coated. I was disappointed only in one regard. The book delivered on the facts, and on balance. The reader gets the impression, however, that some of the battles were not exclusively about ideology, but about some strong personalities. We never get to learn too much about the those personalities, and we are therefore left dangling in places.

Besides earning their own olam habo, what good came of the mesiras nefesh of the farmers from Pavlovka? Author Finkel cites the director of the museum in Mazkeret Batya, responding to his question about what a secular Israeli would see as significant in the story of some stubborn Orthodox farmers:

The vast majority of the visitors to the museum are secular people. I want them to meet face to face with people who had values.

Perhaps this is what we should take into parshas Behar, and then into the year of shemithah – the realization that shemithah is about some of the most important Torah values we come across: bitachon in Hashem as provider, our awareness of the transitory nature of material possessions, and the importance of Eretz Yisrael in the life of a committed Jew.

Read more: <http://www.cross-currents.com/#ixzz31qOpeXz3>
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subject: Shabbat Shalom from the OU

The Wickedness of “Live and Let Live”

Rabbi Eliyahu Safran

A visitor to Sodom seeking to purchase food would be told by the merchants, “keep your money (what’s yours is yours) and I will keep my food (and what is mine is mine)”...

In a complex and difficult world, most people simply want to “tend to their own gardens” – to be left to take care of what is theirs while leaving others to take care of what is theirs. And what could be wrong with that? What is wrong with a laissez-faire attitude, one that establishes fair boundaries between me and my fellow? One which says simply, “you stay on your side of the fence and I’ll stay on mine”?

The logic strikes us as sound. What could be wrong with such an attitude?

In Pirke Avot, we learn that there are four types of people. Those who say, “What is mine is mine and what is yours is yours.” This is the common or average person. There are those who say, “What is mine is yours and what is yours is mine.” Such people are ignorant. Then there are those who say, “What is mine is yours and what is yours is your own.” Such people are saintly. Finally, there are those who say, “What is yours is mine, and what is mine is mine.” Such people are wicked.

Reviewing these four types of people, most readers would associate the last, the wicked posture, with the people of Sodom. After all, was there ever a place more synonymous with evil and wickedness than Sodom and Gomorrah? Yet, it is not the fourth type of person the rabbis associate with Sodom, but rather the first, the one who says, “What is mine is mine, and what is yours is yours.”

The common man.

Rashi describes this common man as saying, “I don’t want others to derive any pleasure from me, nor do I want to derive any pleasure from them.” His commonness is that he shares nothing with the evil man, who wants only to take and nothing with the pious man, whose goal is always to benefit others. The common man is neither fleishig nor milchig. He is pareve. He is white bread. Plain. Uninspired and uninspiring. Not one to praise, but not one to condemn either.

The question is, is he really pareve? Can we really say that, while he has no particular value, he is not bad?

The truth is he is selfish, just like the Sodomites. All they cared about was their own needs. They refused to be concerned with the needs of anyone else. Bear in mind, there would have been minimal sacrifice for the Sodomites to help others. They were not lacking in any way.

The Talmud teaches that the “live and let live” attitude in which each man looks out only for his own interests is both unethical and immoral. It undermines the fundamental social contract. It directly contradicts what Rabbi Akiva identified as the greatest of all Torah principles, Love your neighbor as yourself.

What is missing from the common man’s view of live and let live is “we” and “our.” Some sense that we have a responsibility one for another. Judaism abounds with stories of individuals who shared whatever meager things they had to share. But these are the pious ones. There are those, like the Sodomites, who can afford to be kind and generous and are not.

The Sodomites did not want to share what was “theirs” with anyone else. They would not lend a hand to the tired, the homeless, immigrants, and the “poor souls” who could not support themselves.

Common? Or cruel?

Our sages believed the selfishness and cruelty is founded on the attitude that, “What’s mine is mine, and what’s yours is yours.”

When Reb Levi Yitzchok of Berditshev assumed his rabbinical post he asked to only be invited to communal meetings when a discussion of new policies or regulations were to be discussed. Not long after, a meeting was called to deliberate a new policy that did not allow for beggars to collect door to door in the town but only to stand outside the shul, where each individual would be able to decide if he wanted to contribute.

Reb Levi grew upset after being invited to this meeting. “Why did you invite me to this meeting?” he asked of the elders.

“Because we are to discuss a new regulation, and the Rav’s input is needed,” they responded.

Reb Levi Yitzchak scoffed at them and sharply responded, “This is not a new idea. The idea of limiting opportunities for the poor and not wanting to help others originated in Sodom.”

It is not pareve. It is selfishness that leads us to build a fence around ourselves and our neighbors.

Previous

Rabbi Eliyahu Safran Rabbi Eliyahu Safran

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subject: Weekly Parsha from Rabbi Berel Wein

Weekly Parsha Blog:: Rabbi Berel Wein

Bechukotai

The Torah completes the book of Vayikra in a very stark and disturbing manner. It describes in great detail the negative face of Jewish uniqueness and its special role in human affairs. The Jewish nation is blessed beyond all others but it is also held to a very rigorous standard. Though it is difficult for us ordinary mortals to justify logically in our minds the events of a 1900 year exile of torment and persecution, somehow in Heaven everything that has occurred to us is justified and necessary. It is certainly not pleasant to have to recall the difficulties of our history. Perhaps that is why Jewish history remains a relatively ignored subject in so many Jewish schools today. But the inclusion of the prediction of what would happen to the Jewish people, as detailed in this week’s parsha, remains very instructive.

It is not only the content of that prediction that is so awesome – it is the infinite accuracy of the events that would befall Israel that is so wondrous and incredulous. Ramban declared, almost a millennia ago, that if anyone could predict and accurately describe events that would occur hundreds of years hence, that person would be recognized as a prophet of enormous talent and greatness.

What shall we say nine hundred years after Ramban’s detailed prophecy of Moshe’s, regarding the fate and events that would befall Israel during its historic journey through human civilization. One has to be particularly prejudiced or obtusely ignorant not to be awestruck by the words that appear in this week’s parsha.

We are a different and difficult people. That description of us shines forth from almost every parsha of the Torah. We have a very different and difficult history to relate ourselves to. That is really the reason that the parsha is so detailed and insistent in describing the bleak events of the Jewish future. Most people like to blend in and not advertise their differences and particularities. We all crave recognition, but not all of us want to be treated as celebrities with all of the attendant psychological and emotional baggage that such status invariably brings with it.

The Torah does not allow us to forget for an instant that we are the celebrities on the world stage of events – for good or for better. Moshe emphasizes that truth in his description of the difficulties that Israel will have to encounter and overcome in its future existence. The accuracy of Moshe’s words is ironically vaguely comforting for it confirms to us in a most vivid fashion the uniqueness of the Jewish people and the truth of its faith and Torah.

It is most fitting that at the end of the parsha the congregation rises to strengthen itself and others in the core faiths and observances of Torah and Jewish life. To know and believe in our story is to come closer to our Creator and His Torah. Just as the words of the parsha have been completely fulfilled, so too will the blessings of the Torah be recorded for us and promised to us, and be actualized in our lives and days.

Shabat shalom

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Rav Kook List

Rav Kook on the Torah Portion

Lag Ba'Omer: Rashbi Returns

Leaving the Cave

With the death of the Roman emperor, Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai could finally leave the cave where he and his son had hidden for thirteen years, studying Torah as they lay buried in the sand. But the long years of deprivation and harsh physical conditions had taken a terrible toll on Rabbi Shimon's body.

The Talmud in Shabbat 33b relates that Rabbi Shimon's son-in-law, Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair, went to greet them. Rabbi Pinchas brought his father-in-law to the bathhouse and treated his skin. When Rabbi Pinchas saw the deep cuts in Rabbi Shimon's skin, he began to weep. His salty tears fell onto Rabbi Shimon - and Rabbi Shimon cried out from the pain.

"Woe is me to have seen you in such a state," Rabbi Pinchas lamented.

"On the contrary, you are fortunate to have seen me so," replied Rabbi Shimon. "For if you had not seen me so, you would not have found in me that which you have found."

What did Rabbi Shimon mean by this response? What benefit was there in the scholar's deteriorated state of health?

Strength to Teach

A holy tzaddik like Rabbi Shimon, completely detached from the material world, gave little notice to his physical state. His uniquely elevated soul found comfort and joy in the light of a higher realm, a supernal light that alleviates all physical pain and suffering. However, Rabbi Shimon's ability to teach and influence others was certainly limited by his physical weakness and ill health. For this reason, Rabbi Pinchas cried when he saw his father-in-law's physical state. "Woe is me to have seen you in such a state!"

A Higher Wisdom to Impart

Rabbi Shimon, however, disagreed with this assessment. Rabbi Shimon understood that, on the contrary, it was only due to his current state that he would be able to truly accomplish his mission.

The holy tzaddik was appalled by the widespread materialism and crassness in the world around him. The Talmud relates that when Rabbi Shimon and his son first left the cave, everywhere they looked was immediately consumed by fire. They could not reconcile themselves to society's obsession with worldly matters. "They forsake eternal life and engage in temporal life!" they exclaimed.

If I wish to raise up those mired in the depths of materialism, Rabbi Shimon reasoned, I must first gain for myself a complete mastery over physical desires and transient matters.

Rabbi Pinchas realized that his father-in-law was only able to attain his unique spiritual level by neglecting his body during those long years of concentrated study and prayer in the cave. But Rabbi Pinchas failed to recognize that, beyond Rabbi Shimon's own personal spiritual growth, this period also prepared him to influence others on a deeper level. Rabbi Shimon therefore explained to him, "You are fortunate to have seen me so." Also for your sakes, it is good that I am the way I am. Now you will be able to gain far greater benefit from me. Now you will find in me a higher and more profound wisdom.

Rabbi Shimon's response is now clear. "If you had not seen me so, you would not have found in me that which you have found." Even "that which you find in me" - even my ability to teach and enlighten you - is enhanced according to the quality of my soul's inner purity, an inner aspect not bound by my abilities to communicate with others. The degree by which we are able to influence others is not only a function of rhetoric and eloquence. The extent of our influence primarily depends on an inner quality beyond words and language, a quality residing in the inner chambers of the soul.

The Talmud confirmed Rabbi Shimon's insight with a simple empirical observation. Before he entered the cave, Rabbi Shimon would pose a question and Rabbi Pinchas would offer twelve solutions. After he left the cave, however, Rabbi Pinchas would be the one raising the question. And Rabbi Shimon's enhanced wisdom was such that he would respond, not with twelve solutions, but with twenty-four.

(Silver from the Land of Israel. Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. III, pp. 208-209)

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By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

What is a Temurah?

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Question: Two Temurahs

"Why does the Torah mention the mitzvah of temurah **twice** at the end of this week's parshah, once at the beginning of Chapter 27 and again at its end?"

Answer:

The concept of offering korbanos is foreign to us, since, unfortunately, our Beis Hamikdash still remains in ruin and we are neither required nor permitted to offer korbanos anywhere else. Precisely because this topic is so unfamiliar, we should utilize every opportunity to familiarize ourselves with these laws. There are numerous reasons that underscore the importance of this topic, including:

- (1) When our Beis Hamikdash is rebuilt -- may it be speedily in our days -- we will have to know all the laws about offering korbanos.
- (2) It is part of the Torah we are required to know, and will also help us better understand this week's Torah reading.
- (3) The concept of uneshalmah parim sefeseinu (Hoshea 14:3), that when we are unable to offer korbanos, our reading and studying these Torah sections fulfills our requirement to offer the korbanos.
- (4) There are some very important and little known laws that affect us today. We will soon study them.

What is temurah?

Towards the end of this week's parshah, the Torah mentions a very unusual concept called temurah. Someone who had consecrated an animal to be his korban subsequently changes his mind and decides to substitute a different animal for the korban. By doing

so, he violates the Torah's prohibitions of lo yachlifenu velo yamir oso, "do not exchange it and do not substitute in its stead." The Torah teaches that as a result of his declaration, **both** animals now have the sanctity of that korban (Vayikra 27:10). This means that the declaration succeeded in creating sanctity on the new animal, but failed to remove the sanctity from the original animal. Now, use of either animal for personal benefit is prohibited min hatorah. The animal that attained sanctity because of the second declaration is itself called a temurah (pl., temuros), so the word temurah refers both to the prohibited act and to the animal that is now affected by that act.

What happens to the animal?

What ultimately happens to an animal that has just become a temurah?

Each of the several types of korbanos has specific details as to how it is offered.

Consequently, although every temurah animal has sanctity, its status will be determined by the specific korban for which it was dedicated.

Shelamim

One of the most common types of consecrated korbanos is the shelamim, whose name comes from the word shalom, peace. Rashi (Vayikra 3:1) explains two approaches for its name:

(1) The purpose of a shelamim is to bring peace to the world.

(2) The meat of a korban shelamim is divided: most of it is eaten by the owner in Yerushalayim. He may share it with any tabor person he chooses. A portion of the shelamim, the breast meats and the right thigh, is given to the kohen to eat in Yerushalayim and share with whomever he desires. The mizbei'ach (the altar) receives much of the fat of the animal, the kidneys, its diaphragm meat (which butchers often call the "skirt steak"), and a small part of the liver. Thus, "everyone" is made happy by this korban, and it brings peace to the world.

No gender discrimination

Shelamim is unique among the commonly consecrated korbanos in that one may offer an animal of either gender of any of the three types of kosher beheimah (domesticated animal -- bovines, sheep or goats) and that there is no age restriction once the animal is seven days old. Of the other three main types of common consecrated korbanos, chatas must be female, whereas both olah and asham must be male. Both chatas and asham have other requirements as far as species, and asham has specific age requirements.

Temuras shelamim

Now that we understand some of the basics of shelamim, our question is what happens to a temuras shelamim. This is the subject of a dispute in the Mishnah (Temurah 17b, 18a), but the halachic conclusion is that a temuras shelamim is treated just as a shelamim. It is offered as a korban and its meat is then divided: part eaten by the kohen and his family, a small part burnt on the mizbei'ach and the majority eaten by its owner.

Temuras olah

The other very common type of consecrated korban is the olah, which is completely burnt on the mizbei'ach. In the case of olah, both the original korban and its temurah are offered in the Beis Hamikdash with all the details of the appropriate halachos observed. In this way, a temuras olah is treated similarly to temuras shelamim.

There is, however, one case when this cannot be done, which is when the temuras olah is a female animal. Since an olah must be male, the female temurah cannot be offered. This creates a very interesting predicament, since the female now has the sanctity of an olah, yet it cannot be offered as such because of its gender.

To resolve this difficulty, the temurah is sent out to pasture temporarily. The plan is that, left to her own devices, she will eventually develop a blemish that invalidates her as a korban. This requires a bit of explanation:

The Torah requires that all animals offered in the Beis Hamikdash be unblemished. There is an extensive list of physical shortcomings that invalidate an animal from being offered as a korban. For example, an animal whose legs are of uneven length is invalid as a korban, even though the animal is otherwise perfectly healthy. Also, an animal that shows evidence of damage, such as a split lip, is invalid as a korban. A blemish is called a moom and an animal bearing such a blemish is called a baal moom.

In the case of most korbanos, a consecrated animal that has become blemished is redeemed with the redemption money used to purchase a replacement korban. After the baal moom korban is redeemed, it may be slaughtered and eaten, but one may not work it.

This is what happens to a female temuras olah. She is sent out to pasture with the hope that she will eventually develop a moom that will invalidate her as a korban. When that happens, she will be redeemed, the redemption money being used to purchase a new korban olah.

It is prohibited min hatorah to blemish a korban intentionally (Rambam, Hilchos Issurei Mizbei'ach 1:7); however, one may release the animal to the pasture in the hope that it becomes blemished.

Temuras chatas

There are other instances when one cannot offer the temurah animal in the Beis Hamikdash. For example, both chatas and asham korbanos are offered to atone for

specific sins. If someone creates a temurah of either a chatas or an asham, the temurah has sanctity that will preclude its being used any more by the owner, although it will be invalid for offering in the Beis Hamikdash. Exactly what one does with these animals is discussed by the Gemara and the rishonim but includes too many details to discuss in this article.

Bechor

The temurah of another korban, bechor, has yet a third status. A bechor is a firstborn male animal of a kosher species whose mother is fully owned by a Jew or Jews. An unblemished firstborn male was given to a kohen who brought it as an offering in the Beis Hamikdash. Its meat was eaten by the kohen and his family anywhere in Yerushalayim when they were tavor, and the kohen was able to share it with any tavor person, similar to the laws of a shelamim.

If the bechor is blemished, the halachah is unlike other korbanos, where the blemished animal is redeemed with redemption money that is used to purchase a replacement korban. The owner of a blemished bechor gives the animal to a kohen, who now owns it as his personal property, although he is still forbidden to work the animal and may use it only to slaughter for meat. It is one of the matanos kehunah, the gifts provided to the kohen, so that he can devote himself to his responsibilities as a teacher of the Jewish People. Should the kohen choose to, he may sell it to someone else. There are some other specific laws regarding where it may be slaughtered and how it may be sold, but it may be eaten by anyone, even a person who is tamei.

Temurah of bechor

We have now seen that the korban of bechor is unusual, in that a blemished bechor loses some of its sanctity as a korban and as a result is slaughtered and eaten. The temurah of a bechor, therefore, also has halachic status different from other temuros. The owner gives the temuras bechor to a kohen, who sends the animal to pasture until it develops a blemish, at which point he may slaughter it and consume it (Mishnah Temurah 21a).

Temuras maaser

When the Beis Hamikdash stood, every farmer was required to gather all his newborn kosher animals three times a year and send them through the opening of a pen, one at a time. The farmer counted each animal aloud, and marked each tenth animal exiting the pen with a red mark (Mishnah Bechoros, Chapter 9). This tenth animal has the halachic status of maaser, which is a type of korban. One could not work this animal. Instead, the owner was required to bring it to the Beis Hamikdash, where it was offered as a korban. The owner received most of the meat of this korban, which he was required to eat in Yerushalayim.

This korban shares many halachos with the bechor mentioned above. For example, just as a blemished bechor is not redeemed but is slaughtered and eaten, so too, a blemished maaser is slaughtered and eaten.

There is a difference between the bechor and the maaser, in that the owner is required to give the bechor to a kohen, whereas the maaser he keeps for himself.

There is a similarity between the temurah of bechor and that of maaser in that the temurah is not offered, although it, also, may not be worked, but one waits until it develops a blemish, at which point it can be slaughtered and eaten. In the case of maaser, the owner keeps the animal which he now may eat.

With this information, we can now answer the question asked above:

“Why does the Torah mention the mitzvah of temurah **twice** at the end of this week’s parshah, once at the beginning of Chapter 27 and again at its end?”

Checking the two pesukim, one will see clearly that the first verse (Vayikra 27:10) is addressing temurah of most korbanos, whereas the second verse (Vayikra 27:33) is addressing the temurah of a maaser animal. As Rashi explains on the latter verse, the halachah of temurah for maaser is different from that of other korbanos, which are usually either offered as a korban or redeemed. Whereas it has the sanctity of a korban, the temurah of a maaser prohibits only working the animal. One awaits its developing a blemish, and then slaughters it for its meat.

Who can make temurah?

A person cannot create a temurah unless he is the owner of a korban. This means that if Jerry walks down the street one day and decides that he wants to substitute a different animal for Yosef’s korban, no temurah has happened. Yosef has to make the temurah for his own korban, or, alternatively, authorize someone to make temurah on his korban.

Who is the “owner” of a korban?

Technically, the person who creates the temurah does not have to be the person who originally declared the animal to be a korban, although temurah can be declared only with the authority of the “owner” of the korban, meaning the person who is to benefit from its offering. If one person declared an animal to be a korban for the benefit of another, it is the beneficiary of the korban who is considered its “owner,” not the donor. Therefore, if the beneficiary of the korban subsequently decided to substitute a different animal, he will violate temurah and both animals will become sanctified, whereas if the donor did so, he did not violate temurah, and only the original animal has the sanctity of

the korban. In the latter case, the replacement animal has no sanctity at all and can be worked with or used as one chooses.

Temurah on birds?

The laws of temurah apply only to animal korbanos and not to korbanos of birds or of flour (Mishnah Temurah 13a). Therefore, if someone who has turtledoves set aside for his offerings decided to substitute something, whether a bird, an animal or anything else for the turtledoves, he has not violated the prohibition of creating temurah. Since the declaration was totally ineffective, the original turtledoves will be offered and the substitute animal or bird has no sanctity whatsoever.

Unusual temurah laws

There are several curious aspects to the laws of temurah and sanctifying offerings. One can create a temurah only when the original offering is owned by an individual, but not when it is a communal offering (korban tzipur) or even when it is a korban owned by two or more partners (Mishnah Temurah 13a). Notwithstanding the fact that one cannot make such a temurah, the Rambam (Hilchos Temurah 1:1) rules that one who attempts to substitute an animal for a communal korban violates the Torah’s prohibition and incurs the punishment of malkus. Nevertheless, since the temurah is completely ineffective, the new animal has no sanctity whatsoever. (The original animal is also, of course, not affected, and it is offered as the korban for which it was intended.)

Multiple temurah

Someone can even create several temurah animals at the same time. For example, if the owner tried to remove the sanctity of the original animal by substituting two or more animals in its place, all the new animals become consecrated as korbanos, and the original animal still retains its korban status (Mishnah Temurah 9a).

Negligent temurah

One of the interesting laws of temurah is that someone can create temurah even though he did not intentionally violate the Torah’s prohibition (Temurah 17a; Rambam, Hilchos Temurah 1:2; Tosafos, Temurah 2a s.v. Ha). For example, someone who did not realize that temurah is prohibited will still have created two animals that are holy.

Minor temurah

Here is another unusual aspect to the laws of Temurah. The Gemara teaches that, under certain circumstances, an eleven-year-old girl or a twelve-year-old boy can declare an animal to have the sanctity of a korban, provided that he or she is the owner of the animal (Temurah 2b). This is true even though they are halachically minors and not obligated to observe mitzvos.

The Gemara (2b) discusses whether a minor who can consecrate a korban can also create a temurah. This is highly surprising; a minor cannot violate the prohibition of creating temurah, one would think that he cannot create a temurah either. Evidently, the creation of a temurah is not dependent on violating the prohibition of temurah.

Conclusion

Do we live with a burning desire to see the Beis Hamikdash rebuilt speedily in our days? Studying the halachos of the korbanos should help us develop our sensitivity and desire to see the Beis Hamikdash again in all its glory. May we soon merit seeing the kohanim offering all the korbanos in the Beis Hamikdash in purity and sanctity and Klal Yisrael in our rightful place in Eretz Yisrael as a light unto the nations!