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BS"D

INTERNET PARSHA SHEET ON BECHUKOSAI - 5779

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On Fri, May 31, 2019 at 12:46 AM Esplanade Capital
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Rabbi Yisroel Reisman - Parshas Bechukosai 5779

1 - Topic - A thought on the beginning of the Parsha from Rav Chaim Kanievsky.

As we prepare for Shabbos Parshas Bechukosai, a Shabbos Chazak, a Shabbos of preparation for Kabbalas HaTorah. Let me begin with a piece on the first part of Bechukosai which talks about 26:3 (אם-בְּהִקְטִיתִי, תִּלְכוּ) about those who do go in the ways of Hashem and the promises that the Torah offers. It says as is found in 26:5 (לְשֹׁבֵעַ) you will be Zoche to eat your bread (לְשֹׁבֵעַ) to satisfaction which of course is wonderful. Rashi says (אוכל קמעה הוא מתברך) you eat a little and you are satisfied. Now, of course there is a better way of doing it. You have plenty to eat and you get the pleasure of eating and then you are full. Rashi says the Beracha is (אוכל קמעה הוא מתברך במעיי) you eat a little and you are blessed with being satisfied.

The Chasam Sofer on this Rashi brings the Medrash which is quoted in Tosafos on Kesuvos 104a (Dibbur Hamaschil באצבע קטנה לא) and it is a Medrash that is always somewhat disturbing to me. The Medrash says (עד שאדם מתפלל שיכנס תורה לתוך גופו יתפלל שלא יכנסו מעדנים לתוך גופו) (מתפלל שיכנס תורה לתוך גופו יתפלל שלא יכנסו מעדנים לתוך גופו) Davens that Torah should be absorbed by himself, he should Daven that he should not have fancy food (שלא יכנסו מעדנים לתוך גופו). It brings a Maiseh where Rabbi raised his fingers to Hashem and said, my hands and my body had no pleasure from this world.

It is a very tough Medrash, not to have any permitted pleasure in this world. I remember once that there once was an Asifa and one of the speakers who I won't mention by name said that the Yeshiva'leit have too many pleasures in this world. (עד שאדם מתפלל שיכנס תורה לתוך גופו יתפלל שלא יכנסו מעדנים לתוך גופו).

Rav Shmuel Birnbaum got up to speak afterwards, and Rav Shmuel Birnbaum said that he disagrees with the previous speaker. What is wrong with Maadanin, good things to eat? He said a Yeshiva Bochur who puts in hours at a Seder, stays up late learning at night and afterwards he gets himself an ice cream (which is what I think was Rav Shmuel Birnbaum's example of Maadanin, of a fancy food). So of course he deserves it. Why was ice cream created? For the purpose that a person should have pleasure. Therefore, he was Moche so to

speak in the idea. But the idea is a Medrash and it needs some sort of an explanation.

I have heard often in the name of Rav Shamshon Refael Hirsch, that when a person comes upstairs, G-d will say, you didn't see my Alps? As if there is some Avodah, some serving of Hashem to go see the Swiss Alps. I don't know.

I was once at a wedding in Switzerland and my return flight was delayed for two days, I didn't go to the Alps. I went to the Swiss Kollel and actually learned in the Zurich Kollel for two days. Was I wrong? Should I have better seen the Alps? I don't know.

To answer these questions, let me share with you something that Rav Chaim Kanievsky writes in Taima Dik'ra (page 152) not in this Posuk but on the previous Posuk. The previous Posuk says that if you go Bechukosai, if you follow the Mitzvos in the Torah (וְעַץ הַשָּׁדֶה יִתֵּן פְּרִי) (וְנִתְּנָה הָאָרֶץ יְבוּלָהּ, וְעַץ הַשָּׁדֶה יִתֵּן פְּרִי) the land will give its produce, the trees will give its fruit.

Rav Chaim asks why here in Parshas Bechukosai it says if you do the right thing the land will give its normal fruit. In Ki Savo it talks about Shefa, it talks about somebody who does Ratzon Hashem gets extra blessings. 28:8 (אֶת-יְרוּרֵי אֶתֶר, אֶת-יְרוּרֵי אֶתֶר, אֶת-יְרוּרֵי אֶתֶר) it says there. That a person will have a Beracha with a multiple of 10 times as much as normal. Here in this Parsha what is the Beracha (וְנִתְּנָה הָאָרֶץ יְבוּלָהּ). The land will give its normal crop. That is the Beracha for (אֶת-יְרוּרֵי אֶתֶר, תִּלְכוּ)?

Answers Rav Chaim Kanievsky, the Berachos of Parshas Ki Savo is talking to the Tzibbur of Klal Yisrael. The Berachos in Parshas Bechukosai is talking to those who are Ameilim B'torah, those who work hard on learning. (אֶת-יְרוּרֵי אֶתֶר, אֶת-יְרוּרֵי אֶתֶר, אֶת-יְרוּרֵי אֶתֶר) as Rashi says (שתהיו עמלים בתורה). For a Tzaddik, for a righteous person, for a Talmid Chochom the Beracha is that he should have everything he needs, he should be missing nothing. Does he need wealth? Does he need to spend time on his bank account, on his investments and on everything else?

No! It is true for a simple Jew, it is true that the Jew is allowed to work beyond what he needs to have Ashirus. It is certainly okay. But for the Talmid Chochom the blessing of the Talmid Chochom is that you should have everything you need. (וְנִתְּנָה הָאָרֶץ יְבוּלָהּ, וְעַץ הַשָּׁדֶה יִתֵּן פְּרִי) that is adequate. This is what Rav Chaim Kanievsky says on this Posuk.

So, I come to the next Posuk. (וְאָצְבֶתֶם לְהִמְכֹּר לְשֹׁבֵעַ) the Chasam Sofer says you should have what you need, you should have your bread. (אוכל קמעה הוא מתברך) (במעיי). Not Maadanim, not fancy foods. Before you Daven that Torah should come into you, Daven that fancy foods should not go into you. What is the Pshat?

We are talking to Talmidai Chachamim. We are talking to Baalei Madreiga. Baalei Madreiga are worthy of such a life. If a Baal Madreiga said G-d will ask you did you see the Alps, what are you going to answer?

A Baal Madreiga is afraid if I didn't see the Alps okay I don't know how much of an Onesh there is for that. But if G-d will ask me did you see Masechtas Tamid, did you see Masechtas Meilah, did you see Sefer Yechezkel and Sefer Yeshaya and Yirmiya?

He is scared stiff. That is a much harsher demand. So for someone who can't learn all day and he is a Kovei'a Itim, it is true that he should go see the wonders of HKB"H's world, but someone who is a Talmid Chochom or aspires to be a Talmid Chochom the Beracha is a different Beracha. (אוכל קמעה הוא מתברך) (במעיי). Don't go with Maadanim.

Someone who is Davening that Torah should go into his body is a Baal Madreiga. Who is the last time you asked for that in Shema Koleinu or Ata Chonein L'adam Daas. Someone who is on the level to Daven for that (אוכל) (קמעה הוא מתברך במעיי). A beautiful understanding of the first part of this week's Parsha, Parshas Bechukosai.

2 - Topic - A thought on Kiddush Hashem from Rav Moshe.

The other famous part of Bechukosai are the punishments, the Tochacha. Here I would like to share with you a question. The Kiddush Hashem happens when? Is it true that when HKB"H punishes that is Kiddush Hashem. When HKB"H singles out Klal Yisrael. Is punishment Kiddush Hashem because it shows that HKB"H keeps an accounting. It would seem that way.

Moshe Rabbeinu said to Aharon after the death of Nadav and Avihu as it says in Vayikra 10:3 (בְּקִרְבֵי אֶקְדֹּשׁ). By the fact that HKB"H gives an accounting that is Kiddush Hashem. Yisro said that the Kiddush Hashem was that HKB"H

punishes Middah K'negged Middah when he punished the Mitzrim. Rashi at the beginning of Yisro brings that Yisro said that it is a Kiddush Hashem that HKB"H keeps an accounting. On the other hand we say (ויקרא כ"ג) which is from a Posuk in Yechezkel 38:23. (והתקדש שמי שמי). When does the name of Hashem have Kiddush Sheim Shamayim when HKB"H rescues Klal Yisrael. (ויקרא כ"ג). When Moshiach comes.

On the Yomim Nora'im we say (הקל הקדוש נקדש בצדקה) Ha'keil Hakadosh Nikdash Bitz'daka. Kiddush Sheim Shamayim is when Hashem does Tzedek, does kindness. Which one is it? Is Kiddush Hashem when Hashem rewards Tzadikim or is Kiddush Hashem when Hashem shows an accounting for bad deeds? It needs an answer.

Rav Moshe in the Darash Moshe in the second volume on page Kuf Ches to Kuf Tes which is on the Yomim Nora'im asks this question (Ed. Note: this topic was discussed Parshas Shemini 5779 as well), and he is puzzled by this question.

I once heard a beautiful Teretz. A Yesod in life. Whatever comes your way in life that is unusual and makes you stop and take notice, that is an opportunity for recognizing HKB"H. The opportunity for seeing G-d, the opportunity for seeing that HKB"H runs the world, there are many opportunities. It is what you make of it. When life goes in the regular way, it is hard to see Hashem. The idea of Kiddush Hashem is difficult. When life has turns and twists, when things happen in a person's life that are unusual. Tov Ul'mutav, for the good or for the better. A person looks heavenward, it is an opportunity. A person wins the lottery and looks to G-d, it is an opportunity. A person Lo Aleinu gets a flat tire on a rainy day and he looks to G-d, it is an opportunity. It is always an opportunity. Life is what you make of it. Life is full of challenges. It is what you make of the challenge.

It is true (הקל הקדוש נקדש בצדקה) Ha'keil Hakadosh Nikdash Bitzdaka. It is also equally true (בְּקִרְבֵי אֲנָשִׁים), it is true. Bichukosai is a reminder, there are two ways to have Kiddush Hashem, to have the opportunity to recognize Hashem. (אם-בְּהִקְדָּשְׁתִּי, תִּלְכּוּ) with the Berachos or with the Tochacha G-d forbid. Whatever comes your way in life and we usually have a mixture, make it an opportunity. If you are challenged with a Tochacha like challenge, have it as your goal that when the challenge ends you will look back and say that I grew from it. Let it not be wasted.

A Gut Gebenched Shabbos to one and all as you prepare for the wonderful first week of Sivan, the preparation for Mattan Torah. Why don't we say Tachanun, most of us don't say Tachanun the first week of Sivan. To have an extra five minutes of Davening, to be able learn a Mishna or two. Why take the extra five minutes to Shmooze? Take those five minutes and use them. That is why they are there. Days of Hachana, days of preparation and a Gutten Shabbos to one and all!

from **Rabbi Yissocher Frand** <ryfrand@torah.org>

to: ravfrand@torah.org

date: May 30, 2019, 6:51 PM

subject: Rav Frand - Bechukosai and Destroying Chometz

Dedicated to the speedy recovery of

Mordechai ben Chaya & Henya Chana Raizel bas Rochel Bayla.

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: #1079 – Does a Grandfather Have to Pay for His Grandson's Tuition? Good Shabbos

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

Parshas Bechukosai begins with the blessings the Ribono shel Olam promises if we will keep the Torah. It is very encouraging. Unfortunately, the Torah also shares the “flip side” of this situation: “And if you will not listen to Me and will not perform all of these commandments...” [Vayikra 26:14].

One of the beautiful blessings that the Ribono shel Olam promises Klal Yisrael is, “And I will provide peace in the land, and you will lie down with none to frighten you; I will cause wild beasts to withdraw from the land, and a sword will not cross your land.” [Vayikra 26:6] We must realize – as we see from

Tanach – that (at least at one time in history) there were lions that were indigenous to Eretz Yisroel. This is the whole story of “the lion converts” [Melachim II 17:25-41]. In Biblical times, people worried about wild animals roaming the countryside and thus “I will cause wild beasts to withdraw from the land” was a significant blessing.

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

There is a dispute in the Yalkut Shimoni regarding the promise that Hashem will cause wild beasts to withdraw from the land. Rabbi Yehuda says it means that these wild beasts will be withdrawn from the world entirely. Wild animals will cease to exist: No lions, no leopards, and no cougars – all these animals of prey will become extinct! Rabbi Shimon interprets this blessing to mean that the animals will still exist but they will become pacified so that they do not attack. The lions, leopards, cougars, etc. will become tame and domesticated, but they will still be around. According to Rabbi Shimon, this promise of “withdrawing the wild animals” is akin to the promise of Yeshaya [11:6] that the wolf will live in peace with the sheep in Messianic times. The wolf will still be around, but its nature will change.

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

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

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

The (conditional) blessings at the beginning of the parsha conclude with the pasuk, “I am Hashem, your G-d, Who took you out of the land of Egypt, from being their slaves, I broke the staves of your yoke (motos ulchem) and I led you erect.” [Vayikra 26:13]. Frankly, I am not exactly sure what the term (per ArtScroll translation) “stave of your yoke” means. I assume that there is some kind of piece that is inserted into the yoke of an animal that holds the yoke in place, a type of hinge. Whatever it is, Hashem promises to break these “motos ulchem” which metaphorically caused us to be imprisoned in Egypt as slaves, thereby enabling our freedom and Hashem's ability to lead us from there proudly and standing upright into Eretz Yisrael. This pasuk is a source for something that we say almost every day. Namely, one of the “Ha'Rachamans” in bentsching [Grace after Meals]: HaRachaman Hu yishbor uleinu mei'al tzavareinu; v'hu yoleecheinu komemiyus l'artzeinu. [May the Merciful One break our yoke from our necks and bring us standing tall to our land.]

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

I heard a very nice parable in the name of a Rav Shlomo Zalman Ulman, z"l: When a farmer – at the very end of his harvest, or at least when he is going to stop harvesting for a while – completes his job, he does not break the yoke that was upon the animal. He knows that he is going to need to use this animal again in a couple months for additional work. He knows he will need the yoke again for plowing, harvesting, or other work so he certainly does not want to break it. Therefore, the farmer removes the yoke from the oxen by taking off the staves or hinges that keep the yoke in place, but he does not get rid of the yoke itself. However, when a farmer who has been working the land for sixty years decides, "It is time to hang it up!" he concludes, "That is it! No more farming for me." — What does he do? He takes off the yoke from his animal and tosses it away. He breaks it! "I am never going to use this again. I am finished with farming!" The yoke is too old to resell, so he breaks it!

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

However, in the HaRachamans in bentsching, we pray to the Almighty that the All Merciful One shall in the future permanently break the yoke from upon our necks. We pray that, once and for all, He should smash the yokes of the enslavement of our exiles that we have suffered repeatedly in our history, and that He should lead us finally, once and for all, upright to our Land."

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

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

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

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

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

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

Rav Dovid Povarsky writes further that the great Rav Yisrael Salanter, who was so meticulous about other people's feelings, was not happy about the custom that the Kehillos would hire indigent individuals to take the Aliyah. He used to go around from shul to shul and take the Aliyah himself rather than subject poor people to the shame and humiliation that accepting this Aliyah implied. One time, Rav Yisrael got up and said "I want this Aliyah" and the Baal Koreh refused to read it because he did not want the curses to fall upon his revered

leader. Rav Yisrael then moved the Baal Koreh to the side and read the Tochacha himself! These anecdotes point out how real the Tochacha was to prior generations.

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

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

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

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

Rav Mordechai Kamenetsky writes up this incident, and I have seen it in other places as well. The Nazis, yemach shemam [may[may their name be blotted out]d a sinister habit when they came into a town and rounded up the Jews. They wanted to first humiliate the Jews. It was not bad enough to cart them off and kill them; they first humiliated them before sending them to their deaths.

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

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

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

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

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This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's

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The Birth of Hope (Bechukotai 5779)
Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

This week we read the Tochecha, the terrifying curses warning of what would happen to Israel if it betrayed its Divine mission. We read a prophecy of history gone wrong. If Israel loses its way spiritually, say the curses, it will lose physically, economically, and politically also. The nation will experience defeat and disaster. It will forfeit its freedom and its land. The people will go into exile and suffer persecution. Customarily we read this passage in the synagogue sotto voce, in an undertone, so fearful is it. It is hard to imagine any nation undergoing such catastrophe and living to tell the tale. Yet the passage does not end there. In an abrupt change of key, we then hear one of the great consolations in the Bible:

Yet in spite of this, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not cast them away... I will for their sakes remember the covenant of their ancestors, whom I brought forth out of Egypt in the sight of the heathen, that I might be their God: I am the Lord. (Lev. 26:44–45)

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

Hope is one of the very greatest Jewish contributions to Western civilisation, so much so that I have called Judaism “the voice of hope in the conversation of humankind.”[1] In the ancient world, there were tragic cultures in which people believed that the gods were at best indifferent to our existence, at worst actively

malevolent. The best humans can do is avoid their attention or appease their wrath. In the end, though, it is all in vain. We are destined to see our dreams wrecked on the rocks of reality. The great tragedians were Greek. Judaism produced no Sophocles or Aeschylus, no Oedipus or Antigone. Biblical Hebrew did not even contain a word that meant “tragedy” in the Greek sense. Modern Hebrew had to borrow the word: hence, tragedia.

Then there are secular cultures, like that of the contemporary West in which the very existence of the universe, of human life and consciousness, is seen as the result of a series of meaningless accidents intended by no one and with no redeeming purpose. All we know for certain is that we are born, we live, we will die, and it will be as if we had never been. Hope is not unknown in such cultures, but it is what Aristotle defined as “a waking dream,” a private wish that things might be otherwise. As seen through the eyes of ancient Greece or contemporary science, there is nothing in the texture of reality or the direction of history to justify belief that the human condition could be other and better than it is.

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

What has been will be again,

What has been done will be done again;

There is nothing new under the sun. (Ecc1. 1:9)

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

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

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

Then the Lord your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you and gather you again from all the nations where He scattered you. Even if you have been banished to the most distant land under the heavens, from there the Lord your God will gather you and bring you back. (Deut. 30:3–4)

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

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

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

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

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

Human existence is always oriented towards the future. Man exists by constantly extending his being into the future, both in his consciousness and in his activity... An essential dimension of this "futurity" of man is hope. It is through hope that men overcome the difficulties of any given here and now. And it is through hope that men find meaning in the face of extreme suffering.[2]

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

There seems to be a death-refusing hope at the very core of our humanitas.

While empirical reason indicates that this hope is an illusion, there is something in us that, however shamefacedly in an age of triumphant rationality, goes on saying "no!" and even says "no!" to the ever so plausible explanations of empirical reason. In a world where man is surrounded by death on all sides, he continues to be a being who says "no!" to death – and through this "no!" is brought to faith in another world, the reality of which would validate his hope as something other than illusion.[3]

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

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

Shabbat shalom

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subject: Weekly Torah Message From Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald

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Rabbi Buchwald's Weekly Torah Message – Bechukotai 5779-2019

"The Big 'IF.' The Gift of Free Choice"

(Revised and updated from Bechukotai 5760-2000)

This coming week's parasha, parashat Bechukotai, is one of the two parshiot in the Torah that are known as the Tochacha, the Al-mighty's admonition and reproof of His people, recording the curses and punishments that will befall the people if they fail to fulfill their covenant with Him.

Bechukotai begins with both a promise and a blessing: (Leviticus 26:3) *אם בְּהִקְלְתִּי*, אם תִּלְכוּ, וְאֶת מִצְוֹתַי תִּשְׁמְרוּ, וְעִשִּׂיתֶם אֹתָם, If you, the People of Israel, will follow G-d's decrees and observe His commandments and perform them, then G-d will provide the rains in their proper time and the land will give its produce, and the trees will give forth their fruit.

As a reward for proper behavior, G-d promises abundance in food, and security to the dwellers of the land. He pledges to make the Jewish people fruitful and increase them, and to firmly establish His covenant with them. G-d will place His sanctuary among the Jewish people, and His spirit will not reject them. He will walk among them and will be a G-d to the People of Israel.

Soon after the blessings and the positive assurances, the entire tone of the narrative changes. In Leviticus 26:14, the Torah declares: *וְאִם לֹא תִשְׁמְעוּ לִי*, וְלֹא

אָז, תַּעֲשׂוּ אֵת כָּל הַמִּצְוֹת הָאֵלֶּה, But, if you will not listen to Me and will not perform all these commandments... then the terrible and awesome punishments will strike.

Interestingly, both the portion of the blessing and the portion of the curse begin with the same key word, *אם* —"im" if, *אם בְּהִקְלְתִּי תִלְכוּ*, if you follow My decrees, *וְאִם לֹא תִשְׁמְעוּ לִי*, but if you do not listen to Me. Dr. Yisrael (Shay) Eldad, in his book *Hegyonot Mikra*, writes that this little word, im, if, is the central hinge upon which all Jewish history hangs. Freedom to choose is G-d's special gift to the Jewish people. Our Torah does not speak of predestination or

predetermination, it speaks of choice. Even the Hebrew word for faith, *אמונה* — *emunah*, begins with the same two letters as the word im, implying choice. Rabbis and Jewish theologians speak of "belief" in G-d, *אני מאמין* — "A'ni ma'amin," I believe. They do not generally speak of knowledge of G-d. In fact, Rabbi Joseph Albo, in his *Sefer Ha'Ikarim* (14th – 15th century Spain) wrote (Article 2, section 30): *אִלּוּ יָדַעְתִּי הֵייתִי*, If I knew G-d, I would be G-d!

The mortal, a human being of flesh and blood, cannot possibly comprehend the immortal, the finite cannot fathom the infinite. Furthermore, the word "belief" itself, in fact, implies doubt. When I say, "I believe there is someone in the next room," it implies that I am not absolutely certain. There may be many indications, but there is no conclusive proof. I hear footsteps, I hear noises, I hear speaking, but since I do not actually see the source of the sounds, I cannot be absolutely certain.

Similarly, there is no conclusive proof of G-d's existence. For thousands of years, believers and scholars have been trying to prove G-d's existence. Saint Anselm (1033-1109), Thomas Aquinas (13th-century Dominican friar and theologian), Maimonides—all presented their arguments and "proofs" of G-d's existence. Despite the highly persuasive arguments from many different disciplines, there are only powerful indications, but no conclusive proofs for G-d's existence.

In fact, Judaism looks upon doubt as a healthy and constructive value. The Talmud, in Tractate Shabbat 31a, records three cases of gentiles who come to the sages Shammai and Hillel to convert. The most famous case is the non-Jew who first comes to Shammai stating that he wishes to convert while standing on one foot. Shammai throws him out, but Hillel teaches him: *דְּעָלְךָ קַי, לְתַבְרֵךְ לֹא תַעֲבִיד*, What is hated unto you, do not do unto others. "That is the whole Torah, the rest is commentary. Zil g'mor, go study."

There is a second case in which a prospective proselyte wishes to convert only on the condition that he can become the High Priest. In the third case, the prospective proselyte comes first to Shammai and states that he wishes to convert even though he doesn't believe in the Torah Sheh'ba'al Peh, the Oral Code. Shammai, as expected, rejects him. Hillel, however, welcomes him and begins to teach him the Hebrew alphabet: "Aleph, bet, gimmel, dalet..." When he comes back the next day, Hillel tests him on what he had previously learned. He repeats the alphabet perfectly. But, Hillel replies, "No, it's dalet, gimmel, bet, aleph." Very upset, the proselyte says, "It's just the alphabet, I know the alphabet!" But, Hillel responds, "When you came to me, you didn't know anything. I could have taught you the alphabet incorrectly, and you would not have known the difference. So let's study together, and at the end of our studies, you'll decide whether you believe in the Oral Code or not. Right now, you don't know very much, but when you gain some knowledge, you'll be able to make an intelligent decision."

From this we conclude, that Shammai regarded "doubt" as equivalent to "denial." Hillel, however, felt that doubt was not at all a manifestation of denial, but rather an indication of ignorance.

There's an old Yiddish expression: "Fuhn ah kasha shtarbt men nisht," You don't die from a question! Doubt, in Judaism, is looked upon favorably, since it frequently leads to growth.

The Kotzker Rebbe, one of the great Chassidic masters, was once asked: Who is higher on a ladder, the person on the top or the person on the bottom? He knew it was a trick question, so he responded wisely that it depends on which direction the people on the ladder are going. If the person on top is on his or her way down, and the person on bottom is on his or her way up, then the person on the bottom of the ladder may, theoretically, be higher than the person on top.

If one would ask me, "Who is a good Jew?" I would not respond Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, Reconstructionist, Secular, Zionist, Cultural. I would

rather say that a good Jew is one who is in a “growth mode,” one who desires to grow in Judaism, through study and practice.

G-d has given us a special gift, the gift of choice. אם בְּחֵקְתִי תִלְכוּ, “If” you choose to follow in My decrees and statutes, then you will be blessed. Freedom of choice is the most valuable of the many gifts that G-d has given us. Let us choose wisely. Let us choose G-d, choose growth, and in this manner ensure Jewish posterity and a bright Jewish future.

May you be blessed.

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Parsha Parables By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Drasha Parshas Bechukosai

A Separate Peace

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

“If you will walk in my statutes, and heed my commandments ...” (Leviticus 33:3).

This week the Torah bestows its promise of blessing and peace to those who follow in the path of Torah. Rashi is bothered by the seeming redundancy of walking in statutes, and heeding commands. He explains that “walk in my statutes” refers to arduous Torah study, and “heed my commandments” refers to keeping the mitzvos.

And then there is peace. Hashem promises that if we adhere to the directives, “I will bring peace to the land” (ibid v. 6) In the same verse, the Torah also tells us that “a sword will not pass through your land.” If there is peace, then obviously a sword will not pass through. What is the meaning of the redundancy? Once again, Rashi explains that the “sword passing through” is referring to a sword that is not directed against our people; rather it is a sword that is passing through on the way to another country. Thus the two types of peace.

But maybe there is a different type of peace; one that does not refer to guns and ammunition, but rather to a peace that is on another level.

Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein of B'nei Berak tells the story of Rav Eliezer Shach, the Ponovezer Rosh Yeshiva, of blessed memory.

Rav Shach once entered a shul and sat down in a seat towards the back, and, while waiting for the minyan to begin, Rav Shach began to study Torah. Suddenly a man approached him, hands on his hips, and began shouting at him. “Don’t you know that you are sitting in my seat?” the irate man yelled.

“Who are you to come here and just sit down, without asking anyone permission?”

Rav Shach quickly stood up and embraced the man. He hugged him lovingly as he begged the man for forgiveness. He agreed to the irate man’s every point. “I am so sorry for taking your seat even if it was for a few moments,” he pleaded. Please forgive me. I must have absent-mindedly sat down there. Please forgive me.

The man was taken aback at the Rosh Yeshiva’s humility, and immediately apologized for his rude behavior.

“After the davening, students of Rav Shach approached him and asked why he so readily accepted blame and begged forgiveness for what surely was not a misdeed. After all, why should he not be able to sit down in the seat. Rav Shach explained, “If Torah is all that one aspires to have, then everything else in this world, all the items one would normally squabble about has no significance. When one is immersed in Torah, a seat is meaningless, a place is meaningless. Surely a material object is not worth getting upset over, surely no less rare they worth fighting over. Why shouldn’t I apologize?”

The Torah tells us a secret to peace in our community. If we toil in Torah, there will be peace in the land. The Torah is telling us that if we immerse ourselves in Torah then all the temporal objects that are the fulcrum of most fights are meaningless.

We think of peace as a concept that occurs between nations. However, we often forget that what we need is peace within our own community. A separate peace.

Good Shabbos

Dedicated in memory of Rabbi Dr. Menashe Refael (Manfred) Lehmann of blessed memory.

Rabbi M. Kamenetzky is the Dean of the Yeshiva of South Shore.

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

Shema Yisrael Torah Network

Peninim on the Torah - Parshas Bechukosai

פרשת בחקתי השעט

אם בחקתי תלכו

If you will follow My decrees. (26:3)

Horav Gamliel Rabinowitz, Shlita, renders this *pasuk* homiletically by translating the word *im* (if) innovatively. *Im* contains the same Hebrew letters as *eim*, mother, which leads the *Rosh Yeshivah* (Shaar HaShomayim) to transform the message of the *pasuk* to assert that the mother, the *akeres ha'bayis*, mainstay of the Jewish home, is the one who catalyzes the spiritual growth of her children. She is the one who initiates the process, who ensures their proper entrance to Torah study and *mitzvah* observance. Furthermore, he explains, the Torah alludes to the manner of conveyance that will achieve the greatest results: *B'chukosai teileichu*; if the mother herself will walk in the *mitzvos*, if she will set the example by personally representing how a Jew should live, then her children will follow suit.

A mother sets the standard when she demonstrates her personal love and respect for Torah values, Torah study and observance. It is difficult to impart values when one personally does not adhere to them. Children repeat what they hear at home. They communicate their own values by the demeanor they choose to adopt. A mother projects the image she expects her children to reflect. (Veritably, this applies to both parents, but it is the mother who usually initiates the road map and sets the direction which her children will follow). This establishes the tone in the home and ultimately serves as the lodestar for her children to follow in their journeys through life. What is acceptable for her in the area of dress will, likewise, be acceptable to her daughter. When her son notes how she fills her time, the demands that she places on her husband to learn, attend a *shiur*, have a *chavrusa*, study partner, it will send a powerful message to him: This is how I want you to live. The role of a mother in shaping the Torah *weltanschauung* of her children cannot be overemphasized.

The Torah characterizes womanhood as predicated upon two defining principles: *eizer k'negdo*, “A helpmate corresponding to him.” i.e., providing the environment for a good marriage and demonstrating the ability to address various issues as they surface; and *eim kol chai*, “Mother of all living” i.e., raising children in accordance with the hallowed *mesorah*, tradition, of our ancestors for whom the Torah was the nerve center, their beacon of light which served as their source of inspiration. These two foci, wife and mother, are the two primary responsibilities of the Jewish woman. Whatever else she may do, be it for self-fulfilling reasons (as if wife and mother is insufficient fulfillment) or fringe benefits, the successful woman is one who has navigated and excelled at the first two critical principles of womanhood.

The character and atmosphere of a Jewish home are largely determined by the mother. She is referred to as *akeres ha'bayis*, the mainstay of the home. A Jewish home should maintain its Jewish character 24/7. Jewish atmosphere is not reserved only for *Shabbos*. A Jewish household is conducted solely upon the directives of the Torah. Thus, it becomes a place in which Hashem is inclined to rest among the members of the household. In such a home, one can feel G-d’s Presence throughout.

Primary among the Jewish mother’s role is the education of her children. She does this best by serving as a perfect example of one whose faith and trust is solely in Hashem. One can study about *emunah*, faith, in Hashem, but no *sefer*, Torah volume, will be as effective as observing a mother’s *emunah* from the earliest stages of his life. A child that grows up on a mother’s faith, observing his mother’s tearful prayers every day, listening to her plead with Hashem as she lights the *Shabbos* candles, beseeching Him for (spiritually and physically) healthy children, imbues a child with faith in the Almighty and serves as his anchor through life’s many challenges and vicissitudes.

A child’s earliest memories often continue to inspire him throughout life. There is a well-known story, a vignette that took place shortly following the cornerstone laying of *Yeshivas Ponovezh* in 1944, as General Rommel’s troops

were practically standing at the gates of *Eretz Yisrael*. It was an emotional scene, with the *Ponovezher Rav* weeping bitterly, his tears mixing with the cement that laid the foundation stone of the *yeshivah*. Indeed, Ponovezh was built with tears. It was that night, at the *seudah*, feast, prepared for the few students that were enrolled in the *yeshivah*, that the *Rav* spoke and related the following story.

“You think the laying of the cornerstone took place today? Well, let me inform you that this is not so. The cornerstone laying took place 57 years ago on my mother’s back.”

When the boys heard this, they were astounded. What did their revered *Rebbe* mean by this ambiguous statement? The *Ponovezher Rav* saw the look in their eyes and (emotionally) proceeded to relate the following narrative which I have summarized in my own words.

It was a bitterly cold night, and the frozen ground was covered with five feet of snow. The Kahaneman family (*Ponovezher Rav*’s last name) – father, mother and five sons – sat around the “dinner” table animatedly discussing their day. They had little food to consume, due to the overwhelming poverty in which they lived; enthusiasm, however, always ran high, fueled by their intense love for one another and their extraordinary joy in being alive to learn Torah. Each boy related what he had learned in *cheder* that day. This was despite the deep pall of sadness that permeated the house once their mother had declared that she would not permit her sons to go to *cheder* without a coat and boots. The children were acutely aware that their family was the “proud” owner of only one winter jacket and one pair of boots. Each child begged to be the lucky recipient of the precious winter gear, so that he could attend school the following day.

They each had a reason. The oldest boy, who was twelve years old, insisted that he should go, since his class was starting a new *sugya*, chapter, in the *Gemorah*. The eleven-year-old insisted that he, too, needed to be in class. The next two brothers clamored to be heard; they, too, had reasons to be in school (how things have changed!) The youngest child, Yossk’ke (*Ponovezher Rav*), cried out, “What will be with my *Mishnayos*?”

They decided to drawing lots. Let Heaven decide who was to be the fortunate child that would trudge through five feet of snow to school. The next moments were like *Yom Kippur*. The boys *benched* with extreme intensity, each praying that he would emerge the winner. They recited their bedtime *Shema* with great fervor. They all retired to bed, not knowing which one would wake up in the morning as the winner who would attend school.

At 5:30 a.m. the next morning, the mother, knowing that the *shamash*, sexton, of the *shul* had already lit the coal stove in the *shul* and it was now warm there, woke her oldest son, “Shah! Do not disturb your brothers.”

“Mother. Did I win the raffle?”

“No,” she replied. “I won.”

The mother gave her son food for two meals and wrapped him up in a blanket. She then donned the coat and boots, lifted him up into her arms and carried him to *shul* (which also served as the community *cheder*). The cold was unbearable; the usual five minute walk took twenty minutes (each way). She left him at the *shul* and said, “I will pick you up at 5:00 this afternoon.”

“The mother returned home, blanket in hand, woke her second son, and brought him to *shul* in the same manner that she had done earlier for his older brother. She repeated this procedure with sons number three and four. At 7:00 a.m., after she had been on the “road” for an hour and a half, she returned home and woke Yossk’ke, “Do you want to go to *cheder*?” she asked. He jumped up excitedly, “Yes, of course!”

The mother wrapped him up in the blanket, and they started off for *shul/cheder*. He remarked, “Mother did not walk. She danced! She called out joyfully, ‘*Ribono Shel Olam*, I thank You for allowing my four sons to reach *cheder* today. I am now bringing You the fifth son. Thank You! May they always want to learn Your Torah. May Torah always be sweet to them!”

Young Yossk’ke was so deeply moved by his mother’s words that he called out to her, “*Mameh!* You carried us in the ice and snow in order to learn Torah. You will see that I will bring my boys to learn Torah – for you, *Mameh*, for you.”

The *Ponovezher Rav* concluded his story with those parting words: “I have lost so much. Nonetheless, after all that I have lost and suffered, if I still have the strength to start again, to build a *yeshivah*, it is due to my mother.”

Fifty seven years had passed, but he still remembered how his mother had valued Torah. When a mother demonstrates such extraordinary sacrifice due to her love of Torah, her children see and are inspired. Is it any wonder that her Yossk’ke became the architect of *Torah chinuch* in post-World War II *Eretz Yisrael*?

אם בהקתי תלכו

If you will follow My decrees. (26:3)

Rashi explains *Im bechukosai teileichu*, “If you will follow My decrees” – *she’ tiheyu ameilim baTorah*; “That you will toil in Torah.” This is the deal breaker. It all begins and ends with Torah. One who does not toil (study is not enough; it must be toil) in Torah is not ensured success in *mitzvah* observance. Only one whose life is all about Torah – who studies Torah amid sacrifice, placing it on a pedestal above all else – can hope to follow in Hashem’s decrees.

David *Hamelech* says (*Tehillim* 119:72), *Tov li Toras Picha meialfei zahav va’kesef*, “The Torah of Your mouth is better for me than thousands in gold and silver.” The Torah’s value exceeds that of the most precious metals. It has greater value than the most sought after jewels. Sadly, it takes a spiritual connoisseur – or an intelligent person who is not beholden to his physical desires – to appreciate the unfathomable value of Torah. Perhaps the following story will illuminate us.

A wealthy man encouraged his son to study Torah with greater intensity, claiming that, ultimately, it is the most precious commodity to possess. The son had difficulty with this. “I have been learning Torah for years,” the son said. “The time has come for me to earn a living.” His father asked him to be patient, to continue learning, and he would soon see that nothing is as precious as Torah.

The son returned to his studies. That night, when his father returned from the office, he asked his son what he had learned that day. The young man quoted a *halachah*, explaining it beautifully. “See!” exclaimed the father. “You gained a gold coin (that is what your *dvar Torah* is worth). I worked all day and only earned a silver coin.”

The next day, the son went to the market and chose a number of items from a vendor. The total of his purchases added up to half a gold coin. The son then proceeded to say over the *dvar Torah* to the vendor. After he finished speaking, the son said, “My *dvar Torah* is worth one gold coin. I owe you a half gold coin. Now you owe me a half gold coin.” The young man seriously stretched out his hand, believing that the vendor would give him a coin. Enraged, the vendor grabbed his merchandise and threw the son out of the store. Obviously, when the son returned home, he complained to his father about the purported value of his *dvar Torah*: “You told me that my *dvar Torah* was worth a gold coin. Well, all I received was an angry merchant who humiliated me and threw me out of his store!”

The father listened, went to his safe, and removed a precious diamond from it. “Here,” he told his son. “Take this diamond (which indisputably has considerable value) and go to the fruit and vegetable store, and, after making an order, attempt to pay with the diamond.” The son followed his father’s instructions. The people in the store were very impressed with the diamond’s luster and perfection, and they were even prepared to give up to ten dollars for it. The son said that he would go home and ask his father if he was prepared to sell it.

The father looked at his son and said, “See, unless one is well-versed in the value of an object and appreciates it, he will be unable to grasp its worth.” The next stop was the jewelry store, where the owner offered them a large sum of money for the little “stone.”

Only someone who is involved in the “business” can appreciate the value of a product. The fruit peddler is not proficient in diamonds – as the jeweler is not qualified to determine the value of a mango. One who studies Torah is able to estimate its extraordinary value. To one who learns, nothing is sweeter, more absorbing, more intellectually stimulating, than Torah. One who does not learn has greater problems with which to concern himself.

ואם תלכו עמי קרי ולא תאבו לשמע לי

If you will behave casually with Me and refuse to heed Me. (26:21)

The *pasuk* introduces us to a new aspect of/on sin: Casualness. We persist in thinking (or acting as if we think) that all of Hashem's carefully and meticulously calibrated punishments are merely coincidental: "Things happen." When we act toward Hashem with casualness, He responds, in turn, by making it more difficult to discern the Divine Hand when things happen to us. This leads to *Hester Panim*, Divine concealment, Hiddenness of Hashem's Countenance, making it harder for us to perceive the truth. The concept of *keri*, casualness, applies likewise (not equally) in our interpersonal relationships with our fellowman. We pass people on a regular basis: Do we notice their facial expressions? Do we see joy, sadness, satisfaction, remorse? Do we care? Will our lives change in accordance with our fellowman's circumstances? Are we casual to their plight, or do we carefully calibrate our reactions and responses to them?

Empathy is the ability to share and understand the emotions of others. Such a person himself/herself feels a visceral reaction to the pain of others. They feel fear and/or pain within themselves when seeing others in such a situation. Others feel emotion on a cognitive level, understanding what the other person is going through – but not actually personally sharing in that feeling. There are those who, although exposed to deep emotional conflict and reaction, are personally able to regulate their own reactions and exert control over their emotions. This does not mean the person does not empathize. He just happens to be able to control the expression of his empathy.

These are all terms that apply to the individuals who are not connected to one another and how they react to another person's pain, etc. As *Yehudim*, we are all part of one large collective body. Terms such as ethnic group and cultural/religious similarities do not apply to members of one's family. In our case, we are all components of one body called *Am Yisrael*. Thus, the reaction should be shared overtly, because when one part of the body hurts, the entire body is in pain.

The Torah expects us to feel the plight of others. *Rashi* writes that when we give a loan to a person, it is incumbent upon us to attempt to feel what it is like to be poor. As *Horav Avigdor Nebentzhal, Shlita*, puts it, we must lend money not only with our hands, but with our hearts, as well.

Horav Eliyahu Chaim Meizel, zl, was *Rav* of Lodz, Poland. He took his position seriously, not only in the area of *Halachah*, but also in feeling and caring for the dire circumstances experienced by many of the members of his community. No government programs existed to assist the poor. If one could not afford wood for the winter, his family froze. It was not uncommon for people to sit wrapped in a blanket (for those who had access to one) in order to stay warm. The *Rav* was often seen going from door to door, seeking assistance for those in need.

One frigid, blustery night, he knocked on the door of a wealthy townsman. When the man opened the door to greet the *Rav*, *Rav Eliyahu Chaim* pushed the door wide open and, while standing in the doorway, began to converse with the man. "How are things with your family?" he asked. "How is your wife? Your children? Is your business prospering?" All this was taking place while the icy winds penetrated the cozy warmth of the house, and the wealthy man stood shivering, biting his teeth in the bitter cold. *Rav Eliyahu Chaim* continued what was becoming a monologue, because his teeth were chattering to such an extent that the man could hardly speak. Finally, he said, "*Rebbe*, it is bitter cold outside. Why does his honor not come in, sit down, have a glass of hot tea – and then we can talk?" *Rav Eliyahu Chaim* replied, "I am collecting money to establish a fund to help the needy survive the frigid winter. These people have no heat in their humble homes, and we are seeking to provide them with the bare minimum. I held the door open because I wanted you to experience firsthand what your brothers are experiencing. By feeling the bitter cold, you are able to identify with their suffering. Thus, you will give handsomely to our fund."

As long as a person sits in his warm house, he does not truly understand the plight of his poor brother. Perhaps if his body feels the cold, his own heart will warm up, causing him to be more generous with his contribution. His mind rationally understands what the poor man is experiencing, but this is insufficient empathy. He must actively empathize, viscerally feel the pain, in order to respond appropriately.

Another form of empathy is difficult for many of us to understand, so that we are unable to share in the pain effectively. Some members of our Jewish community (every city has its share of individuals in pain) are alone, in the sense that they are compelled to confront challenges which are complicated and formidable. And they do this alone, because people, inasmuch as they want to help, just do not understand. I say complicated, because every case, every scenario, is different. One can have family that is supportive, but still feel alone: "If 'Avraham' or 'Sarah' do not understand what I am experiencing, then I remain alone."

The following story is both inspiring and eye-opening, teaching us how a great man, a *gadol b'Yisrael* thinks, thus demanding of each of us to think likewise. A man came to the *Yeshuos Moshe, Horav Moshe Hagar, zl*, the *Vishnitzer Rebbe* of *Eretz Yisrael*, with a request for a *brachah*, blessing. Apparently, he was marrying off his daughter the following night, and he felt that he required an extra dose of blessing, as his wife had passed away six months earlier. The *Rebbe* blessed him, but insisted that he call him after the wedding, after the last guest had left the hall. He wanted to speak with him. "But *Rebbe*, it will be very late," the man said. "Do not worry. Regardless of the time, I insist that you call."

One does not say "no" to a *Rebbe*, so, at 3:00 a.m., the proud father called up the *Rebbe*. "*Mazel tov!*" the *Rebbe* began. "How was the wedding? Tell me about the dancing. How many people attended? Who was there? How was the band? Were there flowers on the table? What kind?" The conversation, seemingly about nothing of great significance, continued for almost an entire hour! Finally, the *Rebbe* bid the man, "Good night," and hung up the phone.

The *Rebbe's gabbai*, aide, listened to the conversation in amazement. The *Vishnitzer Rebbe* was a world leader. It was three o'clock in the morning. Surely, he had better things to do and worry about than to discuss the mundane aspects of a wedding.

"Why did the *Rebbe* do this?" the *gabbai* asked incredulously.

"Let me explain my actions to you," the *Rebbe* began.

"This man's wife just passed away. Aside from being left bereft of his life's companion, he also has no one with whom to share the joys and sad events of life. This man just married off his daughter. What do husband and wife/father and mother talk about after a wedding? They review all of the mundane questions that I asked this man. This is what he needed at three o'clock in the morning – someone to talk to, to review the wedding. He no longer has his wife. Instead, I was that 'someone!'"

The *Rebbe* understood what this man was lacking, and he endeavored to fill the need. This story should inspire us to think, to understand and to act accordingly.

Va'ani Tefillah

את צמח דוד עבדך ממהרה תצמיח – Es tzemach David Avdecha meheirah satzmiach. May You speedily cause the outgrowth of David, Your servant, to sprout.

The *Melech HaMoshiach/Moshiach Tziddkeinu* is often referred to in *Tanach* as the *tzemach*, sprout, descendant of David *Hamelech*. *Horav Shimon Schwab, zl*, explains the corollary between sprout and *Moshiach*. Like a seed germinating in the ground, the process of *Moshiach's* coming is slow – but steady. Just as a tiny seed gradually grows, bit by bit, until it breaks through the ground and eventually develops into a full grown tree, so is the coming of *Moshiach* an ongoing and slowly developing process, which will continue until the actual *Moshiach* becomes a reality – speedily, in our time.

Furthermore, just as one waters a plant in order to make it grow, so does the *Tzemach David* develop and grow as the result of the tears of those who mourn over *Tzion* and *Yerushalayim*, who pray continually for the rebuilding of *Yerushalayim* and the coming of *Moshiach Tziddkeinu*.

לעילוי נשמות

הרב הלל ב"ר ישעיהו אליהו ז"ל

ברכה גאולה בת שלמה הכהן ז"ל

ר' יוסף רפאל ב"ר איסר ז"ל

דייעצ בת זאב ז"ל

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Passaic Clifton Community Kollel

PARSHAS BECHUKOSAI

BY RABBI AVROHOM GOLD

Parshas Bechukosai begins by describing the tremendous brachos that Klal Yisrael will receive for following the Torah. However, the Torah sets three preconditions for the brachos – “Im Bechukosai Tailaichu, V’es Mitzvosai Tishmoru, V’a’sisem Osum – if you follow my decrees, keep my Mitzvos, and perform them.” The last two seem understandable; if we do the Mitzvos fully and properly, we will get rewarded. But if so, what does the expression “Bechukosai Tailaichu” add? If we are already performing all the Mitzvos (including learning Torah) what else can be asked of us? Rashi quotes a Medrash that explains that **“Bechukosai Tailaichu” means “Shetihyu Ameilim Batorah”** – that not only must we keep the Mitzvos, we must also put effort into learning Torah. How does the Medrash perceive this from the words “Bechukosai Tailaichu?”

The word “Tailaichu” means ‘to go’. The Kli Yakar explains that we don’t find anywhere in the Torah a command to go with Hashem’s decrees. In fact, the word seems a bit awkward in context. Shouldn’t the Torah say “Im Bechukosai Tikaimu” if you observe my decrees? The Nesivos Shalom answers that there are two aspects of Yidishkeit: the actual Mitzvos, and the Torah’s way of life that one gleanes from learning Torah. There are many things which the Torah doesn’t directly discuss as being Asur or Muttar, but by learning Torah, one can gain an appreciation for how Hashem wants a Yid to live. “Tailaichu” is a way of conducting oneself, similar to the Possuk “Halichos Olum Lo – a way of life for Him” (Chavakuk 3). We are enjoined to live our life for Hakadosh Baruch Hu – not only when performing Mitzvos, but in whatever we do. To live a ‘Torahdika’ lifestyle. Indeed, the word Torah itself comes from the word “hora’a” because it teaches us how to live properly.

[We find a similar expression in Parshas Acharei (18:4), “Uvechukosaihem Lo Sailaichu” where the Torah warns us to not follow the practices of the nations surrounding us. Rashi explains the word “Uvechukosaihem” to refer to a nation’s traditions; practices that are so much a part of their way of life that they become like law. The same word is used in our Parsha except here it says “Bechukosai” – My way of life. Torah is not just a Chachma like all other Chochmos, it is a lifestyle. The Seforno, as well, explains that the word “Bechukosai” means the way one should act during everyday life. Not just through keeping Torah – but Ki Heim Chayainu – living it.]

One example of this is in a Teshuva from the Noda Biyehudah. He was asked (Y”D 6) whether one is allowed to hunt for sport since this seemingly violates the Issur of causing animals unnecessary pain. He answered that even if there would be no technical problem, how can a Yid who’s supposed to live his life towards achieving Olam Haba want to do such a thing. Certain activities may or may not be Assur according to the letter of the law, but they don’t follow the spirit of the Torah.

The Nesivos Shalom concludes that the Medrash explains the words “Im Bechukosai Tailaichu” as referring to Amailus BaTorah because the only way to understand how to live a life of Torah is by putting tremendous effort into learning it. The Gemara in Nedarim (81a) says that the Chachamim, Nevi’im, and Mal’achim were all at a loss to explain why Churban Habayis occurred until Hashem told them, “Al Azvam Es Torasi Asher Nasati Lifneihen V’lo Sham’u B’koli, V’lo Halchu Bo (Yirmiyahu 9:12) – because they left my Torah that I placed before them, didn’t listen to My voice, and didn’t go with It.” Mefarshim explain that the Possuk points out that through delving in Torah we gain the sensitivities and Hadracha for a Torah lifestyle that goes beyond the 613 Mitzvos. Their failure to learn Torah properly led to the Churban.

In the infancy of the State of Israel, Ben Gurion wanted to meet with the Chazon Ish to understand the Chareidim’s perspective on key issues. At one point during the historic meeting, Ben Gurion burst out, ‘Where in the Torah is this written?’ The Chazon Ish answered emotionally, ‘It’s written on the walls of my heart!’ The Gedolim dedicate their lives to Amaillus Batorah and therefore understand clearly how Hashem wants us to live our lives. Just like a professional pianist can detect in an instant if one key on a piano isn’t tuned

properly, so too our leaders, through their years of Limud Torah, have refined their hearts to the point that they can detect even the slightest issues that are not in sync with proper Derech Hashem.

Reb Yeruchem Levovitz zt”l, in Da’as Torah, expands on the theme of living a life of Torah. He says that Torah permeates every aspect of our lives; from the beginning of the day when we say Modeh Ani and wash Negel Vasser, and are taught to put on our right shoe first, until we go to sleep and say Shema. There is no vacation or situation where one is free from the Torah’s directives on how to live. To someone on the outside, it might seem as though we are imprisoned by the Torah. How can one live a life without freedom?

In order to answer this question, let us examine the Yom Tov of Shavuos that we are busy preparing for. The Gemara in Pesachim (68b) says that by other Yomim Tovim there is a question whether to dedicate the day entirely to Ruchnius or to enjoy the Gashmius as well, on Shavuos everyone agrees that we must enjoy Gashmius too. Rav Yosef, in fact, would prepare a lavish meal with the finest meats. Yet, it seems counterintuitive to stress physical enjoyments on the day that we received the Torah. Rav Shimshon Pincus tz”l explains that Torah is an invaluable gift that Hashem gives us. The only way to get this gift is by desiring Torah and by being willing to conform our lives to It. When Hashem offered the other nations the Torah, each one rejected It because they didn’t want to change their lifestyle. Klal Yisrael ‘jumped in’ declaring Na’aseh V’nishma. We had a burning love for Hashem and were ready to live in whatever way He commanded us to. This is our Avoda on Shavuos – to rejoice and display our happiness for the priceless gift of Torah with singing, dancing, and delicious meals; we express our desire to immerse our lives in Torah by staying up all night learning. We show that torah is not only to learn and then set aside. It is our lives from the choices we make, to the food we eat, to every breath we take. Yes, from an outsider’s perspective it might seem difficult, but Na’aseh V’nishma! If one is willing to ‘jump in’ they will experience the sweetest and most incredible life possible. The Mishna in Pirkei Avos (6:4) says about such a life “Ashrechu Ba’olam Hazeh V’tov Luch L’olam Habah!” One who lives a life of Torah is fortunate in this world, and it will be good for him in the next. May we be Zoche!

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