



BS"D

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INTERNET PARSHA SHEET ON BECHUKOSAI - 5784

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Home Weekly Parsha **BECHUKOTAI**

This week's parsha, which concludes the book of Vayikra, deals with the realities of Jewish national and personal life. On one hand it describes in rapturous terms the blessings of happiness, security and serenity that can happen to the Jewish people and to the individual Jew. But on the other hand, it vividly and graphically describes death, exile, and tragedy. Jewish history bears out the accuracy of both visions. We have lived through both experiences. Jewish history seems to have contained much longer periods of darkness than of light, of

more tragedy than of joy and serenity. Though the Torah assigns observance of the commandments as the prime cause of security in Jewish life and non-observance of the same as the cause of tragedy, history and the great commentators to Torah seem to modify this cut and dried axiom. God's wisdom and judgments are inscrutable and are beyond even elementary comprehension by us mortals. As such we are left wondering as to the tragedies that descended upon the Jewish people and that continue to plague us today. Though there are those amongst us that are prepared to give and accept glib answers to the causes of tragedy, the wise men of Israel warned us against such an approach. Observance of commandments is enormously difficult to fulfill completely and accurately.

As such it is difficult to measure the "why" part of this week's parsha. It is sufficient to note the "how it happened" part to realize that its message of contrasting periods of serenity and tragedy has been painstakingly accurate and contains not one word of hyperbole. The destruction of the Temples, the Crusades and pogroms, the Inquisition and the Holocaust are all graphically described in this week's parsha. Such is the prophetic power of the Torah.

In personal life, the longer one lives the more likely tragedy will somehow visit them. The Torah makes provision for this eventuality in its laws of mourning. We all hope for lives of goodness, and secure serenity. Yet almost inexorably, problems, disappointments and even tragedy intrude on our condition.

In Vayikra, the death of the sons of Aharon remains the prime example of tragedy suddenly destroying a sense of pride, satisfaction and seeming accomplishment. In this week's parsha the description of the punishment of Israel for its backsliding comes after a background of blessings and security. The past century presented the Jewish people with horrors of unimaginable intensity and of millennial accomplishments. The situation of extreme flux in our national life has continued throughout the years of the existence of the State of Israel.

The unexpected and sudden, but apparently regular change of circumstances in national Jewish life mirrors the same situation so recognizable to us from our personal lives. We are constantly blindsided by untoward and tragic events. So, the jarring contrast that the two main subjects of the parsha present to us are really a candid description of life and its omnipresent contradictions, and difficulties. Though we pray regularly for health and serenity, we must always be cognizant of how precarious situations truly are. Thus, as we rise to hear the conclusion of the book of Vayikra, we recite the mantra of "chazak, chazak, v'nitchazek" - let us be doubly strong and strengthen others! So may it be.

Shabbat shalom.
Rabbi Berel Wein

from: The Rabbi Sacks Legacy Trust <info@rabbisacks.org>

subject: Covenant and Conversation

COVENANT & CONVERSATION

Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks zt"l

The Rejection of Rejection

BECHUKOTAI

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

There is one aspect of Christianity that Jews, if we are to be honest, must reject, and that Christians, most notably Pope John XXIII, have also begun to reject. It is the concept of rejection itself, the idea that Christianity represents God's rejection of the Jewish People, the "old Israel".

This is known technically as Supersession or Replacement Theology, and it is enshrined in such phrases as the Christian name for the Hebrew Bible, "The Old Testament." The Old Testament means the testament - or covenant - once in force but no longer. On this view, God no longer wants us to serve Him the Jewish way, through the 613 commandments, but a new way, through a New Testament. His old chosen people were the physical descendants of Abraham. His new chosen people are the spiritual descendants of Abraham, in other words, not Jews but Christians.

The results of this doctrine were devastating. They were chronicled after the Holocaust by the French historian and Holocaust survivor Jules Isaac. More recently, they have been set out in works like Rosemary Ruether's Faith and Fratricide, and James Carroll's Constantine's Sword. They led to centuries of persecution and to Jews being treated as a pariah people. Reading Jules Isaac's work led to a profound metanoia or change of heart on the part of Pope John XXIII, and ultimately to the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) and the declaration Nostra Aetate, which transformed relations between the Catholic Church and the Jews.

I don't want to explore the tragic consequences of this belief here, but rather its untenability in the light of the sources themselves. To our surprise, the key statement occurs in perhaps the darkest passage of the entire Torah, the curses of Bechukotai. Here, in the starkest possible terms, Moses sets out the consequences of the choices that we, Israel, make. If we stay faithful to God we will be blessed. But if we are faithless the results will be defeat, devastation, destruction, and despair. The rhetoric is relentless, the warning unmistakable, the vision terrifying. Yet at the very end come these utterly unexpected lines:

And yet for all that, when they be in the land of their enemies, I will not cast them away, neither will I abhor them, to destroy them utterly, and to break My covenant with them: for I am the Lord their God. But I will for their sakes remember the covenant of their ancestors, whom I brought forth out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the heathen, that I might be their God: I am the Lord.

Lev. 26:44-45

The people may be faithless to God but God will never be faithless to the people. He may punish them but He will not abandon them. He may judge them harshly but He will not forget their ancestors, who followed Him, nor will He break the covenant He made with them. God does not break His promises, even if we break ours.

The point is fundamental. The Talmud describes a conversation between the Jewish exiles in Babylon and a Prophet:

Samuel said: Ten men came and sat down before the prophet. He told them, "Return and repent." They answered, "If a master sells his slave, or a husband divorces his wife, has one a claim upon the other?" Then the Holy One, blessed be He, said to the prophet, "Go and say to them, "Thus says the Lord: Where is your mother's certificate of divorce with which I sent her away? Or to which of My creditors did I sell you? Because of your sins you were sold; because of your transgressions your mother was sent away."

Isaiah 50:1; Sanhedrin 105a

The Talmud places in the mouths of the exiles an argument later repeated by Spinoza, the suggestion that the very fact of exile terminated the covenant between God and the Jewish people. God had rescued them from Egypt and thereby become, in a strong sense, their only Sovereign, their King. But now, having allowed them to suffer exile, He has abandoned them and they are now under the rule of another king, the ruler of Babylon. It is as if He has sold them to another master, or as if Israel were a wife God had divorced. Having sold or divorced them, God could have no further claim on them.

It is precisely this that the verse in Isaiah – "Where is your mother's certificate of divorce with which I sent her away? Or to which of my creditors did I sell you?" – denies. God has not divorced, sold, or abandoned His people. That too is the meaning of the promise at the end of the curses of Bechukotai: "And yet for all that, when they be in the land of their enemies, I will not cast them away . . . and break My covenant with them: for I am the Lord their God." God may send His people into exile but they remain His people, and He will bring them back.

This, too, is the meaning of the great prophecy in Jeremiah: This is what the Lord says, He who appoints the sun to shine by day, who decrees the moon and stars to shine by night, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar - the Lord Almighty is His name:

"Only if these decrees vanish from My sight," declares the Lord, "Will Israel ever cease being a nation before me?"

This is what the Lord says: "Only if the heavens above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth below be searched out, will I reject all the descendants of Israel because of all they have done!"

Jeremiah 31:35-37

A central theme of the Torah, and of Tanach as a whole, is the rejection of rejection. God rejects humanity, saving only Noah, when He sees the world full of violence. Yet after the Flood He vows: “Never again will I curse the ground because of humans, even though every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood. And never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done” (Gen. 8:21). That is the first rejection of rejection.

Then comes the series of sibling rivalries. The covenant passes through Isaac not Ishmael, Jacob not Esau. But God hears Hagar’s and Ishmael’s cries. Implicitly He hears Esau’s also, for He later commands, “Do not hate an Edomite [i.e. a descendant of Esau] because he is your brother” (Deut. 23:7). Finally God brings it about that Levi, one of the children Jacob curses on his deathbed, “Cursed be their anger, so fierce, and their fury, so cruel” (Gen. 49:6), becomes the father of Israel’s spiritual leaders, Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. From now on all Israel are chosen. That is the second rejection of rejection. Even when Israel suffer exile and find themselves “in the land of their enemies” they are still the children of God’s covenant, which He will not break because God does not abandon His people. They may be faithless to Him. He will not be faithless to them. That is the third rejection of rejection, stated in our parsha, reiterated by Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, axiomatic to our faith in a God who keeps His promises.

Thus the claim on which Replacement or Supersession theology is based – that God rejects His people because they rejected Him – is unthinkable in terms of Abrahamic monotheism. God keeps His word even if others break theirs. God does not, will not, abandon His people. The covenant with Abraham, given content at Mount Sinai, and renewed at every critical juncture in Israel’s history since, is still in force, undiminished, unqualified, unbreakable.

The Old Testament is not old. God’s covenant with the Jewish people is still alive, still strong. Acknowledgement of this fact has transformed the relationship between Christians and Jews and helped wipe away many centuries of tears.

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Revivim by **Rabbi Eliezer Melamed** (R"Y Har Bracha)

In the Path of the Great Kohanim Pinchas and Matityahu - Revivim

By the merit of Ilan Cohen’s heroic self-sacrifice, may his memory be a blessing, we will defeat our enemies * The mitzvah of settling the Land is a general commandment that obligates the entire Jewish people to inherit the Land * In addition to the general commandment, there is a mitzvah upon every Jew to live in the Land of Israel * Only through fulfilling the Torah and mitzvot in the Land is God’s name revealed in the world * The obligation to make Aliyah demands that people considered very successful forgo their success, and start rebuilding themselves anew

The Soldier Ilan Cohen, May His Memory Be a Blessing On Friday, the 9th of Iyar 5784, the soldier Ilan Moshe Cohen, may his memory be a blessing, was brought to burial on Mount Herzl. Ilan grew up in Buenos Aires, Argentina, received a religious-Haredi education, and at the age of eighteen, recognizing the value of the mitzvah of settling the Land, decided to make Aliyah to Israel, and later, recognizing the value of the mitzvah of serving in the army, decided to join the Har Bracha Hesder Yeshiva. On Wednesday, he fell defending the people and the Land, and his funeral was postponed until his parents arrived in Israel. At three o’clock, immediately after they arrived, the funeral began on Mount Herzl. Being a lone soldier, his friends and Aliyah emissaries asked the public to attend the funeral. Thousands of Jerusalem residents came on the eve of the holy Shabbat to bestow honor upon Ilan, may his memory be a blessing, and to participate in his funeral. Together with them were Ministers Ofir Sofer, Orit Struck and Idit Silman, and Members of Knesset Amit Halevi and Eli Avidar. These are the words I spoke in eulogizing him on Mount Herzl.

The Eulogy

Dear and holy Ilan Cohen. We had hoped that by the merit of the great mitzvah you fulfilled in your Aliyah to the Land, you would merit long life, establish a large family, raise sons and daughters in our cherished ancestral Land, bring joy to your family in Argentina – and now they have been urgently summoned to board a plane to attend your funeral.

In Buenos Aires, you had everything – family, a comfortable life, fluency in the language – yet you chose to leave it all behind and make Aliyah, to bestow grace upon the soil of our holy Land, and to fulfill with your body, the mitzvah that our Sages said is equivalent to all the mitzvot – the mitzvah of settling the Land. You knew that the enemy threatens Israel, and you decided to enlist in the army to defend your brethren, in the Paratroopers Brigade. You had ten free days before your enlistment, and you utilized even those to volunteer at a farm engaged in settling the Land, rising at five in the morning to go out to shepherd sheep, until close to your enlistment date.

As a new, lone immigrant, your army service was more difficult for you, but you did not give up, and even when it was difficult for you during marches, you quietly, and humbly, continued carrying your load. To your friends, the select individuals who made Aliyah with you from Argentina and enlisted in combat units, you said: “It is better to talk and complain less, and to act and help more.” Thus, despite the difficulties, you became an outstanding soldier. You absorbed your foundation in your family and the warm Jewish community in Argentina, which has love for the Torah and tradition, and a warm connection to the people, and the Land. And you continued walking this path with self-sacrifice until the end.

Our Sages taught us that any Jew who is killed for being a Jew is called kadosh (holy), and is assured a place in the World to

Come. In his death for being a Jew, he shed his private garments and cloaked himself in the holiness of Israel. How much more so one who chose to risk his life defending the people and the Land, and saving many lives. And our Sages said: “Whoever saves a single Jewish life, it is as if he has sustained an entire world” (Sanhedrin 4:5), how much more so, one who fought to save the entire people.

There are those who claim that the tribe of Levi is exempt from the mitzvah of military service. But Ilan, the Kohen, followed in the path of the great Kohanim – Pinchas son of Elazar the Kohen who fought against Midian, and Matityahu the Kohen and his Hasmonean sons who fought against the Greeks, for in truth, the Kohanim always volunteered to go at the head of the soldiers to fight Israel’s wars.

For two thousand years, Jews were killed in exile for the sanctification of God’s name; they lived in humiliation, and died in agony, yet they consented to suffer it all out of faith that a day would come when the words of the Torah would be fulfilled in Israel, and the Jewish people would return to their Land, to bring God’s word and blessing to the world.

The days they dreamed of are being realized through the merit of all the immigrants and warriors who sacrificed their lives for the settlement of the Land and its defense, from the Hasidim of the Baal Shem Tov and the disciples of the Vilna Gaon, who made Aliyah to the Land two hundred years ago, until the dear youth making Aliyah today. Through the merit of all the holy martyrs who sacrificed their lives in settlement and defense, the words of the Torah are being fulfilled in us: “And the Lord your God will return your captives and have mercy upon you, and He will return and gather you from among all the peoples to which the Lord your God has scattered you... And the Lord your God will bring you to the Land which your forefathers possessed, and you will possess it, and He will do you good and multiply you more than your forefathers” (Deuteronomy 30:3).

In exile, we were not privileged to bury our dead with honor. They remained scattered along the sides of all the communities to which they wandered, and when they were forced to flee, they left them among the wicked who banished them, consoling themselves that in gilgul mechilot (rolling through underground passages), they would return to the Land. Today, we are privileged to bury Ilan Cohen with a state ceremony in Jerusalem the Holy City, on Mount Herzl, in the presence of ministers and members of Knesset. In this world, Ilan Cohen and all the holy ones buried on this mountain appear to be dead. But in the World of Truth, they are very much alive, and their lives are exceedingly long, for everything built among the people and in the Land, draws from their strength. All the weddings and births are through their strength; all the Torah and divine service, through their strength.

By the merit of Ilan’s self-sacrifice, we will defeat our enemies. By the merit of his self-sacrifice, the deep and warm connection of the Jewish community in Argentina to the Land

of Israel will be strengthened. Thanks to him, many more will make Aliyah to settle the Land and fulfill his aspiration, and thanks to him, all his friends and acquaintances will establish large, blessed families in our cherished ancestral Land. And through this, the bereaved, beloved parents will merit to be consoled with the consolation of Zion and Jerusalem, as the words of the prophet Jeremiah: “They shall come and shout on the heights of Zion, radiant over God’s bounty— over new grain and wine and oil, and over sheep and cattle. They shall fare like a watered garden, they shall never languish again. Thus says the Lord: A voice is heard on high, wailing, bitter weeping, Rachel weeps for her children, she refuses to be consoled for her children, for they are gone. Thus said the Lord: Restrain your voice from weeping, and your eyes from shedding tears; for there is a reward for your labor, says the Lord, and they shall return from the enemy’s land. There is hope for your future, says the Lord, and your children shall return to their borders” (Jeremiah 31:12-16).

The Mitzvah of Settling the Land

To elevate his soul, I will summarize an answer I wrote on the question of whether there is an obligation upon every Jew in the world to make Aliyah to the Land of Israel (you can find the full answer in the ‘Revivim’ article of Issue 893, in the ‘Besheva’ newspaper, titled “The Obligation to Make Aliyah to the Land”).

A: The mitzvah of settling the Land is a general commandment that obligates the entire Jewish people to inherit the Land, meaning to impose its sovereignty over it, and settle it in the best possible way from all perspectives (Numbers 33:53-54), and as Ramban (Nachmanides) defined the mitzvah: “We were commanded to inherit the Land that the Exalted God gave to our forefathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and not to leave it in the hands of other nations, or desolate” (Hasagot to Sefer Hamitzvot, mitzvah 4).

From the commandment upon the entire Jewish people to settle the Land, a mitzvah is derived that obligates every individual Jew to live in the Land, since the general Jewish people cannot fulfill the mitzvah of settling the Land unless every individual is a full partner in the obligation of the mitzvah, until the vast majority of Israel actually resides in the Land. And we have likewise learned that according to the Torah, the obligation to fulfill the mitzvot contingent on the Land that are associated with the community, such as challah, tithes and terumot, depends on the majority of the Jewish people residing in its Land (Maimonides, Laws of Terumot 1:1-3, 26; Peninei Halakha: Kashrut 12:10-11).

In addition to the general commandment that the Land be under Israeli sovereignty and the vast majority of Israel reside in it, there is a mitzvah upon every individual Jew to live in the Land of Israel, even at a time when idolatrous gentiles rule the Land (Ketubot 110b; Maimonides, Laws of Kings 5:12; Laws of Married Life 13:20).

A Mitzvah Superior to Regular Mitzvot

There are those who argue that according to Ramban, the mitzvah of settling the Land is binding at all times, but according to Rambam, it was only binding in the past, and therefore Rambam did not count the mitzvah of settling the Land among the 613 mitzvot. However, the truth is that Rambam did not count the mitzvah of settling the Land because it is more important than a regular mitzvah, and as he explained in the introduction to his Sefer Hamitzvot, it is not fitting to count the overarching commandments that encompass the entire Torah (as elaborated in 'Eim HaBanim Semeichah', Chapter 3, Paragraph 7-10).

Indeed, the general mitzvah of settling the Land which underlies many other mitzvot, is reflected through numerous mitzvot. In addition to all the mitzvot that are directly contingent on the Land, such as tithes and terumot, the mitzvah of establishing a monarchy depends on the Land of Israel, and its purpose is to establish a regime that will express the sovereignty of the Jewish people over its Land, and organize its life in the best possible way (Deuteronomy 17:14-20; HaEmek Davar of the Netziv, ibid.; Mishpat Kohen 144).

Likewise, the mitzvah of building the Holy Temple and all the mitzvot associated with the Temple. The mitzvah of settling the Land also underpins the entire system of mitzvot related to the judicial system, the observance of festivals, and the roles of the Kohanim and Leviim.

Moreover, the entire Torah and its mitzvot were intended to be fulfilled in the Land, for it is only through their observance in the Land that God's name is revealed in the world, to the extent that our Sages said that the observance of mitzvot outside the Land is meant for us to remember to fulfill them when we return to the Land (Jerusalem Talmud Shevi'it 6:1; Babylonian Talmud Kiddushin 37a; Sifrei Ekev 43-44).

The Claim of the Igrot Moshe

There are those who argue that although it is a great mitzvah to live in the Land, there is no obligation to make Aliyah to it (Igrot Moshe, Even HaEzer 1:102). However, as we have learned from our Sages, it is in fact an obligatory mitzvah, and therefore, for example, our Sages ruled that when one spouse wishes to make Aliyah to the Land, the other is obligated to accede to his/her request, and if not, this constitutes grounds for divorce (Maimonides, Laws of Married Life 13:20; Shulchan Arukh, Even HaEzer 75:4). Admittedly, during the years of exile, the rabbis did not encourage Aliyah to the Land, but this was because generally, making Aliyah and living in the Land were fraught with grave dangers, to the point that for those living in exile, it was considered a case of coercion that exempted them from fulfilling the mitzvah. But it did not occur to them that a time would come when Jews would be able to sustain themselves in the Land and there would be those who would argue that it is not an obligatory mitzvah. And even in those difficult days, Rabbi Yehuda HaLevi (Kuzari 2:24) wrote that one had to make a far greater effort to make Aliyah to the

Land, and without doing so, our prayers were "like the speech of a parrot, and the chirping of a starling."

Would I Have Withstood the Test?

I must add: This is the halakha, but unfortunately, I do not know if I would be capable of withstanding the test of making Aliyah to the Land if I had been born in exile. For even when it is possible to live in the Land, it is extremely difficult to leave a familiar place of residence where one knows how to best express oneself, how to educate children, and how to earn a livelihood, and move to a place where one would have to learn the language, and all the different ways of life. The obligation of making Aliyah to the Land demands that those considered very successful forgo their success, and start rebuilding themselves anew. Therefore, I hold in such high regard the immigrants from the United States and Western countries, and especially the young immigrants who enlist in the army and sacrifice their lives, together with all the heroic soldiers, for the salvation of the people and the Land.

Rabbi Eliezer Melamed

from: Ira Zlotowitz <Iraz@klalgovoah.org>

date: May 30, 2024, 7:01 PM

subject: Tidbits for Parashas Bechukosai in memory of Rav Meir Zlotowitz ZTL

Parashas Bechukosai • May 31st • 24 Iyar 5784

This week is Shabbos Mevorchim Chodesh Sivan. Rosh Chodesh is on Friday, June 7th. The molad is Friday morning 12:25 AM and 9 chalakim.

Pirkei Avos: Perek 5

Daf Yomi - Friday: Bavli: Bava Metzia 93

The Sheloshes Y'mei Hagbalah are Sunday, Monday and Tuesday, June 9th-11th.

Shavuos begins Tuesday evening, June 11th.

BECHUKOSAI: Reward for following the Torah • The Tochachah, admonition against abandoning the Torah and the details of the punishment for doing so • The laws of Arachin and Hekdesh • See Taryag Weekly for the various mitzvos • Chazak Chazak V'nis'chazeik!

Haftarah: The haftarah of Parashas Bechukosai (Yirmiyah 16:19 - 17:14) contains a theme similar to the parashah - those who adhere to the mitzvos will be rewarded with great blessings, while those who abandon the path of Torah will be punished.

"וְנָתַתְּ הָאֲרֶזְ יְבוּלָהּ וְעֵץ הַשָּׂדֶה יִתֵּן פְּרִיּוֹ"

"The earth shall give forth its produce and the tree of the field shall give forth its fruit" (Vayikra 26:4)

As reward for observing the mitzvos, the Torah promises that the land will produce fruit and a person will have sustenance. In Parashas Ki Savo (Devarim 28:3-8) however, the Torah promises even more, describing tremendous wealth and abundance for one who keeps the mitzvos. What accounts for the difference in the description of the reward?

In his sefer, Taamah Dikra, Rav Chaim Kanievsky zt"l explains that in Parashas Ki Savo, the Torah is addressing Klal Yisrael in general, for whom abundance and wealth is considered a great blessing. The pesukim in our parashah however, are referring to talmidei chachamim, as Rashi explains, "Im bechukosai teileichu", is referring to Amalei Torah, those who toil in Torah. For talmidei chachamim, material abundance of wealth can be a distraction and a hindrance to their spiritual pursuits rather than a blessing. The pasuk instead accords the greatest blessing to a talmid chacham, that he simply has no less and no more than he needs. The greatest blessing of all is to have precisely what one truly needs for one's own material and spiritual well-being.

We noted above that receiving the aliyah of the tochachah is considered a "bad siman". Rav Chaim himself once told of a talmid chacham in Bnei Brak who received a large monetary inheritance. Shortly thereafter, his newly-found wealth prevented this talmid chacham from remaining in learning full-time. Rav Chaim mentioned that this talmid chacham had once scoffed at the idea that receiving the tochachah aliyah is a "bad siman", and insisted on taking the aliyah. "You see," concluded Rav Chaim, "he did have an unfortunate end!"

from: **Rabbi YY Jacobson** rabbiyy@theyeshiva.net

date: May 30, 2024, 5:26 PM

subject: **Saying Goodbye to Your Old Perception of G-d - Essay by Rabbi YY**

The Endless Quest

A story:

It was Simchat Torah, and the disciples of Rabbi Mendel of Horodok [Vitebsk], many of whom had journeyed for weeks to spend the joyous festival with their Rebbe, were awaiting his entrance to the synagogue for the recital of the Atah Hor'eisa verses and the hakafot procession. Yet the Rebbe did not appear. Hours passed, and still Rabbi Mendel was secluded in his room.

Finally, they approached Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, who had studied with Rabbi Mendel in Mezeritch under the tutelage of the Great Maggid[1]. Perhaps Rabbi Schneur Zalman, who was revered and loved by Rabbi Mendel, would attempt what no other chassid would dare: enter the Rebbe's room and ask him to join his anxiously awaiting followers.

When Rabbi Schneur Zalman entered Rabbi Mendel's study, he found the chassidic master deeply engrossed in his thoughts. "The chassidim await you," said Rabbi Schneur Zalman. "Why don't you join them for the hakafot?"

"There are a hundred meanings to the verse Atah Hor'eisa," cried Rabbi Mendel, "And I do not yet fully understand them all. I cannot possibly come out to recite the verse without a proper comprehension of its significance!"

"Rebbe!" said Rabbi Schneur Zalman. "When you will reach a full comprehension of the hundred meanings of Atah Hor'eisa,

you will discover another hundred meanings you have yet to comprehend..."

"You are right," said Rabbi Mendel, rising from his seat.

"Come, let us go to hakafot."

Throwing Out the Old?

An interesting verse in this week's second portion, Bechokosei, reads[2], "You will eat the very old [grain] and you will remove the old to make way for the new."

A homiletic interpretation of the verse understands "the very old" to symbolize G-d, who has "been around" since time immemorial and who represents eternity. One ought to eat and satiate one's hunger with "the very old" G-d [3].

Yet there comes a time in our life when we need to "remove the old to make way for the new." We should never get stuck in our old definitions of G-d. We must be ready to abandon our old perception of G-d for the sake of a more real and mature relationship with ultimate reality.

It is not always easy, but this is the path forward.

Our old definitions of G-d can become traps which stifle our creativity, hinder our growth, and keep us stuck in the quagmire of our fears, traumas and insecurities. G-d can become an opium, an excuse for not allowing ourselves to be challenged in a genuine way. Religion sadly becomes the factor which holds us back from an honest assessment of our lives and the courage to rethink our mistakes or dysfunction. The only definition of G-d in Judaism is that He has no definition. This means that a relationship with G-d is the readiness to challenge every comfort zone, every addiction, every fixed paradigm. It is the openness to mystery and to the ultimate knowledge that "I do not know."

Spiritual Frustration

A little while ago, a man approached me one morning in the synagogue and expressed his anguish over the fact that he does not experience G-d anymore in his life.

"When I originally became a baal-teshuvah (returnee to Jewish observance) many years ago," he said, "I felt an intimate relationship with G-d. I sensed His truth and His depth.

"Today," the man continued, "I am still a practicing Jew. I put on teffilin each morning, I pray three times a day, I keep the Sabbath and I don't eat shrimp. But G-d is absent from my life. "How do I become a baal-teshuvah again?" the Jew wondered.

As I looked up at his face, I noticed a tear in his eye. I thought that he may be far better off than many people born and raised as observant Jews who have never shed a tear over G-d's absence from their lives. Many of us are even unaware of the fact that there exists a possibility to enjoy a genuine personal relationship with Hashem.

In the midst of our emotional conversation, I noticed on the table a 200-year-old Chassidic work titled "Noam Elimelech." I opened the book, authored by the 18th century Chassidic sage Rabbi Elimelech of Liszhensk [4], and randomly arrived at the Torah portion of this week, Bechukosai.

In his commentary to the first verse of the portion, the Chassidic master discusses an apparent lack of grammatical accuracy in the blessings that we recite daily. "Blessed are You, Lord our G-d," we say, "Who has sanctified us with His commandments."

Why do we begin the blessing by addressing G-d in second person, "Blessed are You," and then conclude it by addressing Him in third person, "Who has sanctified us with His commandments."?

The Paradox

In the beginning of one's spiritual journey, writes the saintly author, when first discovering G-d in one's life, Hashem seems very near. At that special moment of rediscovery, you feel that you "have G-d," that you grasp His depth, His truth, His grace. You and G-d are like pals. You cry to Him, you laugh with Him, you are vulnerable in His midst. Like one who is reunited with a best friend not seen in many years, you declare: "G-d! You're awesome." "Blessed are You."

But as you continue to climb the ladder of spiritual sensitivity, you come to discover the gulf between you and infinity. This is not a sign of distance, but of closeness. When you become close to truth, you can begin to sense how far you are from truth.

A deeper relationship with G-d allows you to sense the void and the distance. That void becomes the womb where a new relationship can be born[5].

Far But Near

It is this state of mind that the Prophet Isaiah is addressing when he says [6], "Peace, peace to him who is far and near, and I will heal him." How can one be both "far and near" simultaneously?

The Chassidic master Rabbi Elimelech answers that Isaiah is referring to the Jew who feels that he is far, but in truth he is near. The very fact that one senses is remoteness is indicative of his closeness. If he truly were to be distant, he would actually feel close!

When the first Jew Abraham is taking his son Isaac to the Akeida (the binding of Isaac) atop the sacred Mt. Moriah in Jerusalem, the Torah tells us[7] that "On the third day, Abraham looked up and saw the place from afar. Abraham said to his attendants, 'You stay here with the donkey, and I and the lad will go yonder, we will prostrate ourselves and then return to you.'"

Why did Abraham take his attendants along if he was to leave them behind anyway? Because it was only Abraham who "looked up and saw the place from afar." Only Abraham realized how remote he still was from the Divine mountain. His attendants, on the other hand, actually thought that the place was near. At that moment, Abraham became aware of the vast sea separating his spiritual state from theirs; he knew that they were not ready yet to accompany him on his journey toward G-d.

Thus is the paradox of one's spiritual process. The closer you become, the further you must become. It is to this Jew, harboring deep humility and frustration, that G-d sent forth His promise: "I will heal he who is far and near."

[1] Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Horodok (also called Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Vitebsk) and Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi were both disciples of the Great Maggid, Rabbi DovBer of Mezeritch, the second leader of the Chassidic movement. Following the Maggid's passing in 1772, Rabbi Schneur Zalman regarded Rabbi Mendel as his master and mentor. In 1777, Rabbi Mendel led a group of more than 300 chassidim to settle in the Holy Land. Rabbi Schneur Zalman was originally part of the group, but Rabbi Mendel convinced him to remain behind and assume the leadership of the chassidic community in White Russia and Lithuania. This story and footnotes I copied from: <https://www.meaningfullife.com/atah-horeisa/> [2] Leviticus 26:10. [3] See Bas Ayin on Bechukosei (by Chassidic master Rabbi Avraham Dov of Avrutch. Rabbi Avraham passed away in 1841 in Sefad.) [4] Passed away in 1787. Rabbi Elimelech was a disciple of the Maggid of Mezrich and was considered to be one of the greatest tzaddikim of his generation. [5] This point is also quoted in the name of the Baal Shem Tov (Kesser Shem Tov section 39.) Cf. Tanya section 3 chapter 7. [6] Isaiah 57:19. [7] Genesis 22:4-5.

<https://www.israelnationalnews.com/news/390743>

May 29, 2024, 10:45 AM

A message to Jews throughout the world

Dear bothers, face reality. Don't fool yourselves. The city is going up in flames.

Yosef Mendelevich

During my eleven years in Soviet prisons for attempting to hijack an airplane to escape to freedom in the Land of Israel, one of the things which kept my faith strong was a postcard which I received from my sister who had managed to immigrate to Eretz Yisrael. The postcard pictured a sun-filled landscape of the Promised Land. For me it was proof that my dream was real and possible to achieve if I did not surrender to the obstacles in my path.

Today I am a grandfather in Jerusalem. My sons and sons-in-law are soldiers in Tzahal. The struggle for the Land of Israel continues.

I call upon all of you, Jewish brothers and sisters throughout the world, to come join us in protecting our Land and our Nation and in further actualizing a dream of 2000 years.

There are people who have a sweeping vision of history. They are able to predict historical developments which will bring about great change in the world. One such world-changing event was the exile of the Jewish People from its ancestral Homeland.

For nearly 2000 years our nation suffered a long and difficult wandering from one foreign land to the next without any national sovereignty of our own. We suffered through the Crusades; the Inquisition and expulsion from Spain; the revolutions in Russia with endless pogroms against Jews; and the horrors of the Nazi regime.

Today, one does not have to be a prophet to understand that the world is undergoing another historical revolution which will have far-reaching implications.

For example, Europe is experiencing Muslim infiltration via a vast Muslim immigration, the goal of which is to conquer the modern Western world. As a reaction to the massive Muslim intervention, Europeans have begun fighting against the Islamic revolution they face in order to save common Jewish-Christian values from becoming lost and forgotten.

In a similar fashion the Woke movement in the United States is trying to eradicate traditional American values.

These extreme and fanatic movements for change invariably adopt an anti-Semitic slant. Jew hatred becomes the fashion of the day. As we have learned many times the hard way, this anti-Semitism can lead to violence and worse.

It is a natural tendency for people to avoid the need to face unpleasant realities. People choose to placate themselves with the thought that everything will pass by without painful repercussions. However our Sages teach that the wise person sees the “nolad” - the future situation that the present will lead to. An intelligent person with a knowledge of history and the ability to perceive matters clearly realizes that the present state of mankind is no passing fad. The present situation threatens every Jew in the world and his family.

The only place that a Jew can feel safe is in the State of Israel, even though we are at war, because here a Jew can hold a gun with an army of Jewish soldiers by his side and fight to defend his life and the life of the Jewish Nation.

There is a ballad that was sung in Poland before the Holocaust. “Our city is in flames. Why do you stand with your hands in your pockets? No one will save you. You must save yourselves. Open your eyes and see – the enemy already has conquered half of the city. Don’t stand by and do nothing on the side.” To my sorrow, people didn’t listen to this truthful warning. They hoped that perhaps the danger would pass. Alas, raging conflagrations don’t die away by themselves. Dear brothers, face reality. Don’t fool yourselves. The city is going up in flames. Come home to Israel where we will be together and where we can triumph over the terrible evil confronting us with our weapons and with our faith.

Am Yisrael Chai!

Yosef Mendelewitch is a refusenik from the former Soviet Union, also known as a "Prisoner of Zion" and now a rabbi living in Jerusalem who gained fame for his adherence to Judaism and public attempts to emigrate to Israel at a time when it was against the law in the USSR.

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

date: May 30, 2024, 4:36 PM

subject: Rav Frand - Focusing In on The Opening Words of the Parsha – Part 1: Teleichu

Parshas Bechukosai

Focusing In on The Opening Words of the Parsha – Part 1: Teleichu

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand’s Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: #1293 – A Tragic Holocaust Shailah. Good Shabbos!

My thoughts this week all revolve around the opening words of Parshas Bechukosai:

The parsha begins (Vayikra 26:3) with the words “Im bechukosai teleichu” (If you go in my decrees). Rashi at the beginning of the parsha notes that these words cannot refer to simple mitzvah observance because that is covered by the continuation of the pasuk – “v’es mitzvosai tishmeru” (and My commandments you shall keep). Rather, Rashi says that the words indicate “she’tee’he’yu ameillim b’Torah” (that you should be laboring in the Torah) – indicating that a person must sweat in his effort to study and master Torah learning. My first thought focuses on the word teleichu. Why is the verb teleichu (you go) associated with intense learning?

Rav Meir Shapiro, the Lubliner Rav, founded the famous Yeshivas Chachmei Lublin. The entrance exam to the yeshiva was knowing 300 blatt of Gemara by heart. The smicha exam at the yeshiva was 1000 blatt of Gemara by heart. I don’t know how many bochrin today would be accepted to such a yeshiva. Rav Meir Shapiro also founded the now widely-adopted Daf Yomi program. Besides everything else, he was a master darshan (a tremendous speaker).

For the building dedication of Yeshivas Chachmei Lublin, Rav Meir Shapiro had a pasuk engraved on the walls of the Yeshiva building: “Go my children (Lechu banim), listen to me, I will teach you the fear of Hashem.” (Tehillim 34:12) The obvious question on that pasuk is why does it say Lechu banim – Go my children? Shouldn’t it say Bo’u banim... Come my children? Rav Meir Shapiro explained that the proof of whether a person has succeeded in learning – whether he became a talmid chochom or a yareh shamayim or a ben Torah – is not while he is in a yeshiva. The proof is after he has left the yeshiva. If the yeshiva made an impression on him such that he is a ben Torah, an honest Jew, and a Jew who fears Heaven – even after he has left the yeshiva, that proves that the yeshiva has done its job in properly educating him.

As long as a person remains in yeshiva, the peer pressure and social pressure may be keeping him in check. People do not like to stand-out, so they toe the line. But when they are out of yeshiva, then the proof is in the pudding. That is what the pasuk means when it says: Go my sons.... “After you leave the yeshiva, I want to see if I can in fact recognize the type of

person my yeshiva is supposed to produce through your behavior.”

Rav Meir Shapiro added that this is what limud haTorah is all about. Limud haTorah is about the impression Torah makes on the person and how it forms him. Does he become a different person? Therefore, “Lechu banim (Go out, my children).”

Based on this observation, the Tolner Rebbe says as follows. Perhaps this explains why the pasuk at the beginning of our parsha also uses the verb “Bechukosai teleichu” in reference to toiling in Torah study. Perhaps it is because a person’s essence is recognizable when he is already teleichu – on the way, when he is already “out there in the world.” The true mark of the impact a person’s Torah study made upon him is how he acts in the business world and how he acts in the secular world when he is not within the four walls of the beis hamedrash. That is why the pasuk at the beginning of our parsha uses a verb indicating being on the road rather than a verb such as tishma’u (you shall listen) or tavinu (you shall understand). The Tolner Rebbe then mentions a beautiful story involving the Pnei Menachem (Rav Pinchas Menachem Alter, the seventh Gerer Rebbe, 1926-1996). When the Pnei Menachem was a very little boy, his father – the Imrei Emes (the fourth Gerer Rebbe) – taught him the siddur. The Imrei Emes taught him how to daven and the proper sequence of the prayers throughout the siddur. This was before the young child was even ready to study Chumash or Mishnayos. When he got to Krias Shma sh’al hamita, the Imrei Emes explained to his son that this was the prayer recited before going to bed at night. The little Pnei Menachem asked his father “Why do we say Krias Shma sh’al hamita BEFORE we get into bed if it is called Krias Shma sh’al hamitah (literally — the reading of Shma upon the bed)? “Al hamitah” implies, he asked, that a person should say it when he is already IN bed!

The Imrei Emes answered his little son: Krias Shma represents acceptance of the yoke of Heaven. A person cannot accept the yoke of Heaven while stretched out in bed. That does not work. Therefore, it needs to be said before you actually lie down. The young son persisted: then why is it CALLED Krias Shma sh’al hamita (upon the bed), it should be called Krias Shma sh’lifnei hamita? The Imrei Emes told him it is because when a person actually lays down in bed is when we see what affect the past day’s learning had on him. Even the “al ha’mita” – the sleep – should become a different sleep. The sleep itself should be infused with kedusha because its purpose is for you to be strong and be well and fortified to serve Hashem properly the next day.

Lechu banim shimu li – Go my children, listen to me: When you are on the way, when you are driving, that is when we see what kind of Jew you really are. Im bechukosai teleichu – in the going (haleecha) – we recognize what a person’s toiling in Torah has accomplished.

Focusing on The Opening Words of the Parsha – Part 2:
Bechukosai

My second observation reflects on the second word in the pasuk: Im bechukosai teleichu – If in my decrees you go (upon which Rashi comments, as mentioned before, “you should toil in Torah study”). There is an obvious question that many commentaries ask. In fact, in the beginning of this week’s parsha, the Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh provides 42 different explanations of “Im bechukosai teleichu – she’tee’heyu ameillim b’Torah” (that you should be laboring in the Torah) – indicating that a person must sweat in his effort to study and master Torah learning.

A chok (decree) is a law whose reason is unknown. Examples of chukim include shantnez, chazir, neveilah, and Parah Adumah. However, the mitzvah of studying Torah is not a chok! It is a davar seechlee – a very rational commandment. Torah study is an intellectual pursuit. It seems quite incongruent that out of all the words to use to mean “you should toil in Torah study,” the Torah uses the word chukosai (my decrees). A far more appropriate wording would be “Im b’mitzvosai teleichu” or “Im b’mishpatai teleichua”, rather than “Bechukosai teleichu!”

The Beis HaLevi gives us a clue to answer this question in Parshas Mishpatim. When Klal Yisrael, said “na’aseh v’nishma” (we will do and we will listen), chazal say that they merited many spiritual rewards and acquisitions. The Beis HaLevi explains that when they said “na’aseh” (we will keep the Mitzvos), that obviously included learning Torah because it is necessary to learn what is in the Torah in order to know what to do. We can’t keep Shabbos unless we learn Hilchos Shabbos. We can’t put on Tefillin unless we learn Hilchos Tefillin. Thus, included in the “na’aseh” is learning Torah. We need to know what to do. Why then do we need “nishma”? It can’t be that we need “nishma” because we need to know what to do. We already know that based on “na’aseh.” “Nishma” means we want to learn more, even though we already know what to do.

When someone knows how to drive, he no longer needs to read the driving manual. Our cell phones come with detailed manuals. Once we learn how to use a phone or any other appliance, do we ever look at the manual again? What kind of endeavor is it that a person knows what to do, has been doing it for his entire life and he is still learning it? That is the “chok” of limud haTorah. I learn for no other reason than learning’s sake. Learning itself has incredible value.

Do you think that Rav Chaim Kanievsky needed to review Hilchos Shabbos or Hilchos Tefillin? He knew it by heart! So why did he need to finish the entire Torah every single year? It is because we are supposed to learn even if we already know what we are supposed to do. This is the “decree” of Im b’chukosai teileichu.

The sefer Avir Yakov presents the following mashal (parable): Someone is taking a walk and sees his friend drive by. The friend pulls over and shouts out the window “Can I give you a ride? I am headed in your direction anyway.” The pedestrian

responds, “No. I am walking because I am supposed to walk. I have no specific need to reach a particular destination. I merely walk upon my doctor’s orders – cardio, weight-loss, all the good things in life!” This is the equivalent of “Im b’chukosai teleichu – she’tee’he’yu ameillim b’Torah” We do not study merely for the knowledge. We study because this is what the Almighty orders us to do.

When I first came to Ner Israel High School, more than fifty years ago, not knowing any better, I figured I would walk into the Rosh Yeshiva – Rav Ruderman’s office and give him a ‘shalom aleichem’. I came into the office wearing my cap. The Rosh Yeshiva looked at me and must have wondered, “What does this kid want?”

This memory that sticks in my mind until this very day includes being struck by what the Rosh Yeshiva was doing. The yeshiva was learning Gittin that zman. The Rosh Yeshiva was sitting there shuckling over his Gemara, learning Gittin daf daled. Do you think Rav Ruderman, zt”l, needed to review Gittin daf daled? How many times had he learned Maseches Gittin? How many times had he said shiurim on Maseches Gittin? So why was he learning Maseches Gittin? “Im b’chukosai teleichu.”

That is one pshat why Torah study is referred to as a chok. The other pshat that I would like to share is from Rav Simcha Zissel Brody, who explained that it is because of the “magic-like” power of Torah. Torah study can change people. There is no other endeavor like it. Studying chemistry or mathematics, etc. does not change a person, but Torah does. That is “Im b’chukosai teleichu” – the inexplicable facet of Torah’s ability to transform people.

I recently spoke in Lakewood at a siyum on Seder Nashim. A couple of months prior I was at an event where I found myself sitting next to a self-described “Modern Orthodox” Jew. We were sitting at this dinner and we started schmoozing with one another. He told me about his experience with Daf Yomi. He described the incredible impact it made on him. Knowing that I had to speak in Lakewood, I again got in touch with him and asked if he would write-up for me what he had told me that night at the dinner. This is what he sent to me and this is what I said in Lakewood. I believe it is a succinct summary of the power of “Im b’chukosai teleichu.”

As I was moving into my thirties, I found myself floating through life, being less serious about and less connected than I should be to my Yiddishkeit. While I was certainly a regular ‘shul goer’ on Shabbos, it had been years since I had made any regular effort to attend minyan during the week. Other than occasionally learning with one of my sons to study for a test that he was having in school, I had not opened up a sefer in years. Basically, I had become an Orthodox Jew who was feeling pretty disconnected from meaningful Yiddishkeit and from Hashem.

Then I went to the Siyum HaShas in Met-Life Stadium several years ago. I decided to start Daf Yomi study – learning on my

own. I went through Maseches Brochos and then Maseches Shabbos got tough for me. I was getting less committed to it and then Maseches Eruvin was a knock-out punch. I stopped learning Daf Yomi.

A while later I met my uncle, who convinced me that the only way to study Daf Yomi was in the context of a Daf Yomi shiur. “If you rely on doing it yourself, it isn’t going to happen!” So I decided I would go to a 5:30 am Daf Yomi shiur.

I resumed Daf Yomi by Eruvin 50a. Daf Yomi literally changed my life for the better in so many ways. Before long, I started making an effort to daven Mincha and Maariv every day. I soon found myself in the local sefarim store holding a copy of the Ramchal’s Derech Hashem. I was inclined to give it a shot some 25 years after I last touched it. I was blown away by that sefer and couldn’t put it down. One thing led to another and I started to grow in my Yiddishkeit and started to feel a more serious and meaningful keshet with Hashem. For me, it all started with Daf Yomi – the concept that every single day, regardless of whatever daily challenges and frustrations come my way, I could set everything else aside and find menuchas hanefesh in the Gemara. It is an amazing thing.

That is what Rav Simcha Zissel means when he speaks about the treasured dimension of Torah study to expand and elevate the soul of those who engage in it. Torah has this magical ability to transform a person. That is what the fellow wrote: “It changed my life!” A fellow who hadn’t picked up a sefer in years, now cannot put the Derech Hashem down!

Do you appreciate what he is saying? The Derech Hashem is not one of the easiest seforim to study. Daf Yomi not only changed his life, it changed his wife’s life and the lives of his children as well. That is the chok of Torah – the power to expand and elevate all those who diligently study it.

Transcribed by David Twersky; Jerusalem

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This week’s write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand’s Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. A listing of the halachic portions for Parshas Behar/Bechukotai is provided below:

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from: **Michal Horowitz** <contact@michalhorowitz.com>

date: May 30, 2024, 11:00 AM

subject: **Bechukosai 5784: The Klalos and Jewish Destiny**

With this week's parsha, Parsha Bechukosai, we close the book of Vayikra once again. Bechukosai is a short parsha which deals with two main topics: the klalos (curses) that will befall Israel in exile (Vayikra 26), and arachin (valuations), when one dedicates the value of a certain item to the Beit haMikdash (Vayikra 27).

The parsha begins with a series of eleven pasukim that delineate the brachos (blessings) that will be showered upon Israel when the nation goes in the way of Hashem, keeps the mitzvos, and toils in Torah. These blessings include: the rain will fall in its time, the land will yield its produce and the trees of the field will give forth fruit; the nation will eat to satiation and dwell securely in the land; there will be peace in the land and wild animals will cease from the land, and no sword will even pass through the land; the nation will chase its enemies and they will fall by sword; we will be fruitful and many, and Hashem will walk amongst us and be for us a G-d, and we will be His nation, and He will lead us with upright, strong and proud stature (Vayikra 26:3-13).

And then, the Torah warns us that if the nation does not go in the ways of Hashem, terrible disasters will befall us (Vayikra 26:14-46). The disasters are many, and they are painful. Our cities and land will lay desolate, we will fall before our enemies, we will be pushed into the cities where plague will break out, there will not be sufficient food, the land will not yield its produce, our enemies will eat what we sow and grow, there will be panic, fever, and wasting away, we will flee before our enemies and even run from the sound of a rustling leaf, parents will consume the flesh of their sons and the flesh of their daughters they will consume, G-d will not accept our offerings and our temple will be destroyed and laid waste, we will be scattered amongst the nations of the world and the sword will follow us, we will be lost amongst the nations and we will have no upright bearing in the lands of our enemies... and so on, and so forth.

These verses are amongst the most painful in the Torah (along with the klalos of Ki Savo, found in Sefer Devarim). Anyone aware of any epoch in Jewish history recognizes the klalos that have befallen us time and again. It is difficult for us to understand and comprehend, with our limited, mortal, finite vision, how such events can happen. There is no answer to how or why the exile is so long, so bitter, so painful and so dark. Hashem is Ha'tov Vi'ha'meitiv - the One Who is good and does good; yet in this world, the good is sometimes difficult to discern. We do not say it does not exist, for Hashem created the world only to do good to His creations; but at times, it is hidden from our eyes.

While it is true that the Torah tells us the klalos will befall us when we reject the mitzvos and do not go in the ways of Hashem, Eichah tells us that the prophet, the nation, and our city of Yerushalayim cry out to the Heavens and weep and declare: כִּי אִם-מֵאֵס מְאֻסְתֶּם וְעַלְיֵנו עֲדֹמָאֵד, For even if You

have utterly rejected us, have You not raged sufficiently against us? (Eichah 5:22).

In regard to Oct. 7, Gitty Beer, one of the United Hatzalah members who raced to the South on that date (at great and very real danger to their own lives, and who continued to work in the south in the days following Oct. 7) relates: "Near the entrance to Kfar Aza there is a gas station. Inside there is a convenience store whose shelves had been emptied by soldiers who took whatever there was on the shelves and left notes with their contact information so that they could pay the owners at a later date.

"When we pulled into the gas station on Tuesday afternoon (three days after the massacre), I saw an old man sitting near one of the outside tables and eating a yogurt. By this time, it was rare to see civilians in the area, and he was so out of place that he caught my eye. His clothing was shabby and tattered, and he had a very neglected appearance about him. He seemed to be about 80 years old.

"I approached him and asked gently, 'What are you doing here?' 'I got hungry so I came to look for food,' he replied. 'Where did you come from?' 'I was in the safe room in my house in Kfar Aza.' I was shocked. 'But there is no one here anymore! Everyone was already taken from Kfar Aza!' 'I don't know anything about that,' he replied. 'My wife and I came outside, and we didn't see anyone, but I was hungry, so I went to look for food.'

"When I heard the old man's words, my heart broke. The world had just come to an end in their village, and suddenly, these two old people just appeared out of nowhere, roaming around, with no idea of what had occurred. It was mind-boggling. I took the couple to an ambulance and gave them something to eat and drink, and we sent them to the hospital, where they would meet with a social worker who would take charge of their case" (Angels in Orange, The Shaar Press, p.116-117).

The pasuk tells us:

וְכָשְׁלוּ אִישׁ-בְּאָחָיו כַּמְפַגְּנֵי-חֶרֶב וְרִגְף אֵין וְלֹא-תִהְיֶה לְכֶם תְּקוּמָה לְפָנַי אֲבִיבְכֶם - Each man will trip over his brother, as if fleeing from the sword, but without anyone chasing after you; you will not be able to stand up against your enemies (Vayikra 26:37). On the words: every man will trip over his brother, Rashi, quoting the Sages, teaches: Each man will stumble because of the sins of his brother, שְׂכָל יִשְׂרָאֵל עֲרַבִין זֶה לָזֶה, for all of Israel are guarantors and are responsible for one another (ibid).

The fate of one Jew is the fate of another, and the destiny of our nation is the destiny of us all. Lest any one person think he can escape the story of Am Yisrael, the Torah tells us otherwise: you are all responsible for one another.

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik zt'l, the Rav, teaches: "Our fate does not distinguish between aristocrats and common folk, between rich and poor, between a prince garbed in royal purple and a pauper begging from door to door, between a pietist and

an assimilationist. Even though we speak a plethora of languages, even though we are inhabitants of different lands, even though we look different - one may be short and dark, the other tall and blond - even though we live in varying and unequal social and economic conditions - one may dwell in a magnificent palace and the other in a miserable hovel - we still share the same fate. If the Jew in the hovel is beaten, then the security of the Jew in the palace is endangered. 'Do not imagine that you can escape to the king's palace from the fate of all the Jews.' (Esther 4:13). Both Queen Esther, garbed in royal apparel, and Mordechai the Jew, clad in sackcloth, were caught in the same web of historical circumstances. 'Chaverim kol Yisrael, All Israel are knit together' - we will all be pursued unto death or we will all be redeemed with an eternal salvation" (Megillat Esther Masoret HaRav, p.87).

In the aftermath of Oct. 7 and the terrifying and terrible events that have occurred in the eight months since, we can only daven that the verses of nechama (comfort) in our parsha shall come to fruition immediately and in our days.

וְזָכַרְתִּי אֶת־בְּרִיתִי יַעֲקֹב וְאֶף אֶת־בְּרִיתִי אַבְרָהָם אֶזְכָּר וְזָכַרְתִּי אֶת־בְּרִיתִי יִצְחָק וְאֶף אֶת־בְּרִיתִי אַבְרָהָם אֶזְכָּר וְזָכַרְתִּי אֶת־בְּרִיתִי יִצְחָק וְאֶף אֶת־בְּרִיתִי אַבְרָהָם אֶזְכָּר - and I will remember the covenant of Yaakov, and also the covenant of Yitzchak, and also the covenant of Avraham I will remember, and the Land I will remember (Vayikra 26:42).

May the mercy of HKB"Y be aroused (Tehillim 79:8), may our enemies fall before us and not vice versa (Vayikra 26:7-8), may the groan of the captives come before Him (Tehillim 79:11), and may HKB"Y remember us while we are in the land of our enemies, never utterly rejecting us to annul the eternal covenant of Am Yisrael with our Merciful Father in heaven (Vayikra 26:44).

May we learn the lesson of collective responsibility (quoted above) and recognize finally that we have sufficient enemies without; and only our brothers are our friends within.

When we return unto each other with ahava and achva (love and brotherhood), and return unto Hashem with passion, love and desire for His Torah and mitzvos, perhaps then the geula will come and we will merit the promise of: וְנָתַתִּי שְׁלוֹם בְּאַרְצֵךְ וְשָׁכַבְתֶּם וְאַיִן מִתְּגַרֵּד - and I will put peace in the land, and you will lay down and fear no one (Vayikra 26:6). For as Rashi comments on this

verse: אִם אֵין שְׁלוֹם אֵין פְּלוֹם, if there is no peace, there is nothing... מִכָּאֵן שֶׁשְׁלוֹם שְׁקוּל כְּנֶגֶד הַכֹּל... from here we learn that the blessing of peace equals all other blessings (ibid). הַתְּאֵתָה לְנֶצַח תִּבְעַר כְּמוֹ־אֵשׁ קִנְיָתָה 'עד־מָה הַתְּאֵתָה לְנֶצַח תִּבְעַר כְּמוֹ־אֵשׁ קִנְיָתָה - Until when, Hashem, will Your wrath burn forever? Will your jealousy burn like fire? (Tehillim 79:5);

הַשִּׁבְנוּ הַשִּׁבְנוּ - return to us, Hashem, and we will return to You, restore our days as of old (Eichah 5:21). בְּרַכַּת בְּשׂוֹרֹת טוֹבוֹת וּשְׁבַת שְׁלוֹם

Alan Fisher <afisherads@yahoo.com>

date:May 30, 2024, 10:42 PM

subject: Shabbat Shalom: Potomac Torah Study Center Devrei Torah for Shabbat Bechukotai 5784

BS"D May 31, 2024 Potomac Torah Study Center

Hamas continues to manipulate the media while pretending to negotiate with Israel. Hersh Polin Goldberg, cousin of very close friends of ours, remains a captive. We continue our prayers for the hostages and all our people stuck in Gaza. Israel is being roundly condemned for causing a fire at a humanitarian tent camp in Rafah, despite the fact that intelligence indicates it was the fault of Hamas. For more information, see

<https://mail.yahoo.com/d/folders/1/messages/ABuU1xg-JoTtZliKAwH70IO8PXo> May our people in Israel wipe out the evil of Hamas, protect us from violence by anti-Semites around the world, and restore peace for our people quickly and successfully – with the continued help of Hashem.

When one considers Bechukotai, thoughts obviously focus on the Tochacha, the lengthy section of blessings and horrible curses that dominates this final parsha of Vayikra. As usual, Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander's Dvar Torah brings a profound message for current challenges facing our people.

After the Tochacha, the Torah turns to the Arachin, mitzvot of how to value a person or animal that someone vows to donate to the Beit HaMikdash. Rabbi Brander observes that after the awful curses of the Tochacha, an obvious reaction is to question whether anyone living through such an experience would consider himself to have any value to God.

Rabbi Brander observes, following the Kotzer Rebbe, that the Torah turns to the Arachin as a tikkun for the Tochacha, to lift the spirits of our people who have just gone through horrible disasters. The Torah teaches how to value people, thus demonstrating that Hashem values every human, whether during good times or bad. The Torah states that every human has value, and we must cherish every human life. We need to absorb this message, especially during the dark period since October 7, when we have lost many Jewish lives to Hamas, the kidnaping and hostages, and even to the people of Gaza who have suffered and died.

As an economist, the real cost of any action is opportunity cost – what could have been in lieu of the unfortunate action. For each Israeli killed, the opportunity cost is what that person could have been plus the personal losses of each person important to the deceased victim. For hostages, the opportunity cost includes the value of the time the hostage lost as well as the cost of returning the person to full physical and mental health.

The opportunity cost of the Arab/Israeli conflict includes the seventy-five years during which the Arabs have refused to live in peace with Jews. During much of the period of Christian persecution of Jews in Europe, the Arabs permitted Jews to live and work in peace in their lands. These periods were

From: Alan Fisher <afisherads@yahoo.com>

times when Arabs flourished in culture and science. Since 1948, with Arab countries focusing on destroying Israel, Jews have been flourishing in science, medicine, and literature, but Arabs seem to have little value added to these fields. If Arabs, including the PLO, Hamas, and other terrorist groups, had instead focused on improving the world, who knows how much they might have contributed. Here is a summary from Wikipedia:

Of the 965 individual recipients of the Nobel Prize and the Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences between 1901 and 2023, at least 214 have been Jews or people with at least one Jewish parent, representing 22% of all recipients. Jews represent approximately 0.2 percent of the world population – and up to 22 percent of Nobel Prize winners. Where are the Arabs in this counting? The opportunity cost of hating Jews is stunning.

The campaign of the more than a hundred million Arabs in the Middle East compounds the opportunity cost of the Arab war against Israel. Since 1948, the other Arab countries have rarely permitted any “Palestinians” to immigrate into their countries. These countries appear to want to keep descendants of Arab citizens in Israel from 1948 in refugee camps surrounding Israel. If other Moslem countries in the Middle East had permitted families who fled Israel to become citizens of their countries, many of them might have become productive adults and contributed to tikkun olam. When Israel turned over Gaza to the Arabs in 2006, they left the modern Israeli equipment and agriculture that had made the land productive. The Arabs destroyed all the Israeli improvements and turned Gaza into a desert refuge for hatred.

Rabbi Brander’s focus on the lessons of Arachin is only a beginning of the disaster of Middle Eastern politics for the people of the region – and for the world. Hashem gave humans free will and the opportunity to work to improve the world or make it worse. The lessons of the past nearly eight months is the beginning of the cost of Arab hatred of Jews. My discussion extends the analysis to include the huge costs that go beyond these eight months. Including the costs of the explosion of anti-Semitism throughout the world makes the opportunity cost too great for me to explore.

Despite the horrors facing Jews throughout the world, we still have a mandate to do all we can to make the world a better place. One necessary condition is to work on our personal mitzvot, including our personal relationships with Hashem. We must also teach these lessons to our children and grandchildren. Our relationships with others should include evaluating their attitudes toward Jews and Israel. Making the world a better place includes making Israel safe and fighting anti-Semitism in schools, universities, and all levels of government – both in our country and abroad.

Much of the inspiration for my weekly Dvar Torah message comes from the insights of Rabbi David Fohrman and his team of scholars at www.alephbeta.org. Please join me in

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From: **Alan Fisher** <afisherads@yahoo.com>

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from: Ohr Torah Stone <ohrtorahstone@otsny.org>

subject: Rabbi Riskin on the Weekly Torah Portion

Parshat Bechukotai: A Vision of Transformation

Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Riskin is the Founder and Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone

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

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

If so, this means that our present realities can be sanctified, ennobled – but need not be utterly destroyed. Or will the messianic age have to inaugurate an entirely new world, an indelible change in the nature of the universe, radically different physics and physical existence?

I would like to suggest that such not-only-theoretical speculation can be discerned as the preoccupation of the great sages of the Mishna, and their two alternate theological views give rise to two different translations of a word in this Torah reading.

The opening of Bechukotai sounds remarkably redolent of the messianic dream, the goal of human history. God promises the Israelites that if they but maintain His laws and commandments, their physical needs will be taken care of with good crops and good harvests, and the ever-present danger of wild animals will be removed:

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

How are we to understand the concept: “cause to cease”? The Midrash (Torat Kohanim) records that Rabbi Yehuda defines v’hishbati as God causing these “evil beasts” to disappear from the world, that God will destroy them. However, Rabbi Shimon interprets the word to mean that God will cause the

evil of these beasts to cease: their evil nature will be destroyed, but the beasts themselves will not be destroyed.

Since this is not the only dispute recorded between these two sages, various commentaries have attempted to discern a more fundamental difference in their positions. For example, regarding the festival of Passover, our Bible commands: “Seven days [of Passover] shall you eat unleavened bread; but by the first day you shall have caused the leaven to cease to exist (tashbitu) from your homes.” (Exodus 12:15)

Clearly, the term for the “destruction” of leavening (chametz) is the same as the term for the “destruction” of wild beasts. And, true to form, we find the following difference of opinion in the Mishna:

“Rabbi Yehuda rules there is no destruction except with fire, but the sages rule [including Rabbi Shimon] that [the leavened substance] may be turned into crumbs and scattered to the wind or thrown into the sea.” (Pesachim 21a)

According to the Rogachover Rebbe, their debate is primarily semantic: in terms of how to define the verb sh-v-t, which may best be translated “to cease to exist.” Rabbi Shimon (as well as the majority of the sages) defines “tashbitu” as the destruction of the primary function: as long as the leavening is no longer edible or the wild beasts are no longer vicious, they can be considered to have been destroyed. Rabbi Yehuda, on the other hand, insists that destruction, or ceasing to exist, must include the substantive demolition of the object itself.

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

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

The final example relates to the problem of oil left over in a lamp which had been lit before the start of a festival. Rabbi

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

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

On the other hand, Rabbi Yehuda is not so optimistic and does recognize the existence of evil. Hence, he emphasizes the biblical command “and you shall burn out the evil from their midst” (Deut. 17:7).

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

On Shavuot, however, it will be sanctified, transformed into two holy loaves of challa (chametz) brought on the altar to God. What was forbidden (evil) seven weeks ago has now been redeemed. If anything, Shavuot is a manifestation of the redemption of evil, of our vision of the possibility of dedicating every aspect of our existence to God.

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

Rabbi Yehuda insists that the evil beasts will be destroyed in the messianic period, a time when all that is evil will be

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