

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

Smartphones can do amazing things – few more amazing than Waze, the Israeli-designed satellite navigation system acquired by Google in 2013. But there is one thing even Waze cannot do. It can tell you how to get there, but it cannot tell you where to go. That is something you must decide.

The most important decision we can make in life is to choose where we want eventually to be. Without a sense of destiny and destination, our lives will be directionless. If we don't know where we want to go, we will never get there no matter how fast we travel. Yet despite this, there are people who spend months planning a holiday, but not even a day planning a life. They simply let it happen.

That is what our parsha is about, applied to a nation, not an individual. G-d, through Moses, set out the stark choice. "If you follow my statutes and carefully obey my commands, I will send you rain in its season and the ground will yield its crops and the trees their fruit ... I will grant peace in the land, and you will lie down and no one will make you afraid."

If, on the other hand, "You do not listen to Me, and do not keep all these commands," then disaster will follow. The curses set out here at length are among the most frightening of all biblical texts – a portrait of national catastrophe, bleak and devastating.

The entire passage, both the blessings and the curses, can be read supernaturally or naturally. Read the first way, Israel's fate, at least in biblical times, was a direct result of its faithfulness or lack of it to the Torah. G-d was constantly intervening miraculously in history to reward the good and punish the bad. Every drought and famine, every bad harvest or military defeat, was the result of sin. Every peaceful and productive year was the result of obedience to G-d. That is how Israel's prophets understood history.

But there is also a more naturalistic reading, which says that Divine providence works through us,

internally rather than externally. If you are the Israelites in the land of Israel, you will always be surrounded by empires and enemies bigger and stronger than you are. You will always be vulnerable to the hazards of rainfall and drought because Israel, unlike the Nile Delta or the Tigris-Euphrates valley, has no natural, reliable, predictable supply of water. You will always, therefore, find yourself looking up to the heavens. Even quite secular Jews often understand this – most famously David Ben Gurion when he said, "In Israel, in order to be a realist you have to believe in miracles."

On this reading, the way of life set out in the Torah is unique in ways that are natural rather than supernatural. It is indeed the word of G-d, but not G-d as a perpetual strategic intervener in history, but rather, G-d as guide as to how to live in such a way as to be blessed. The Torah is a set of instructions for life issued by the Designer of life. That is what the sages meant when they said that at the beginning of time, "G-d looked into the Torah and created the world." Living according to the Torah means, on this view, aligning yourself with the forces that make for human flourishing, especially if you are a tiny people surrounded by enemies.

What was unique about the society envisaged by the Torah is that in it every individual mattered. Justice was to be paramount. The rich could not buy special treatment and the poor were not left destitute. When it came to communal celebrations, everyone – especially the orphan, the widow, the stranger – was to be included.

Everyone had at least some share in the harvest of grain and fruit. Employers were to treat employees with fairness and sensitivity. Even though there were still slaves, one day in seven they would enjoy the same freedom as their owners. This meant that everyone had a stake in society. Therefore they would defend it with their lives. The Israelites were not an army conscripted by a ruler for the purpose of his own self-aggrandizement. That is why they were capable of defeating armies and nations many times their size.

Above all, they were to have a sense of destiny and destination. That is the meaning of the keyword that runs like a refrain through the curses: *keri*, a word that appears seven times in our parsha and nowhere else in Tanakh. "If you walk with Me with *keri* ... then I will walk with you with *keri*."



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There are many interpretations of this word. Targum Onkelos reads it as “hard-heartedly,” Saadia as “rebelliously,” Rashi as “treating as a casual concern.” Others understood it as “harshly,” or “with hostility.” Maimonides, however (partially echoed by Rashi, Rashbam, Ibn Ezra, Chizkuni and others), understands it as related to the word mikreh, meaning “chance.” Hence the meaning of the passage according to Maimonides is: “If you believe that what happens to you is simply a matter of chance, then, says G-d, I will leave you to chance.”

On this reading, the book of Vayikra ends as it began, with the fateful choice between mikra (with an aleph) and mikreh (with a heh): between seeing life as a call, a summons, a vocation, a destiny, and seeing it an accident, a random happening with no ultimate meaning whatsoever.

So it is in the life of nations and individuals. If you see what happens to you as mere chance, your fate will be governed by mere chance. That is what the sages meant when they said, “Wherever [the Torah] says, ‘And it came to pass,’ it is always a prelude to tragedy.” If you simply let things come to pass, you will find yourself exposed to the vagaries of fortune and the whims of others. But if you believe you are here for a purpose, your life will take on the directedness of that purpose. Your energies will be focused. A sense of mission will give you strength. You will do remarkable things.

That was the special insight Jews brought to the world. They did not believe – as people did in ancient times and as atheists do today – that the universe is governed by mere chance. Was it mere chance that a random fluctuation in the quantum field produced the Big Bang that brought the universe into being? Or that the universe just happened to be regulated by precisely the six mathematical constants necessary for it to give rise to stars and planets and the chemical elements essential for the emergence of life? Was it mere chance that life did in fact emerge from inanimate matter? Or that among the hundred million life forms that have existed on earth, just one, Homo sapiens, was capable of asking the question “Why?”

There is nothing self-contradictory about such a view. It is compatible with all the science we now know, perhaps with all the science we will ever know. That is

the universe as *keri*. Many people think this way. They always did. On this view, there is no “Why,” not for nations, and not for individuals. Life just happens. We are here by accident.

Jews believed otherwise. No one said it better than the Catholic historian Paul Johnson: No people has ever insisted more firmly than the Jews that history has a purpose and humanity a destiny. At a very early stage in their collective existence they believed they had detected a divine scheme for the human race, of which their own society was to be a pilot. They worked out their role in immense detail. They clung to it with heroic persistence in the face of savage suffering. Many of them believe it still. Others transmuted it into Promethean endeavours to raise our condition by purely human means. The Jewish vision became the prototype for many similar grand designs for humanity, both divine and man-made. The Jews therefore stand right at the centre of the perennial attempt to give human life the dignity of a purpose.

The people who change the world are those who believe that life has a purpose, a direction, a destiny. They know where they want to go and what they want to achieve. In the case of Judaism that purpose is clear: to show what it is to create a small clearing in the desert of humanity where freedom and order coexist, where justice prevails, the weak are cared for and those in need are given help, where we have the humility to attribute our successes to G-d and our failures to ourselves, where we cherish life as the gift of G-d and do all we can to make it holy. In other words: precisely the opposite of the violence and brutality that is today being perpetrated by some religious extremists in the name of G-d.

To achieve this, though, we have to have a sense of collective purpose. That is the choice that Moses, speaking in the name of G-d, set before the Israelites. Mikra or mikreh? Does life just happen? Or is it a call from G-d to create moments of moral and spiritual beauty that redeem our humanity from the ruthless pursuit of power? “To give human life the dignity of a purpose.” That is what Jews are called on to show the world. ©2016 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"And I shall provide peace in the land and you shall lie down at night without fear.” (Leviticus 26:6) This Torah portion comes at the end of The Book of Leviticus, called by our Sages “the Torah of the Kohen-Priests” – the religious leadership of Israel whose task it was to minister in the Holy Temple and to teach Torah to the nation. A public remnant of their priestly function exists to this very day, when the Kohanim bestow the priestly benediction upon the congregation during the repetition of the Amidah, every

morning in Israel and during the major Festivals in the diaspora.

The problem with this priestly benediction, however, is the concluding words of the blessing recited by the Kohanim before intoning the benediction: "Blessed art thou Oh Lord our G-d King of the Universe who has sanctified us with the sanctity of Aaron and has commanded us to bless His nation Israel with love." What is the significance of these words, "with love"? And if the Kohanim do not feel the emotion of love towards the congregation, does this invalidate their benediction? Where do we find any kind of parallel for the necessity of an emotion of love as prerequisite for a blessing?

I believe we will discover the answer to our question, as well as the proper interpretation of the priestly benediction, in the process of an investigation into the meaning of the difficult text in the beginning of our Torah portion. The reading of Behukotai begins, "If you will follow my decrees and observe my commandments..., then I will provide your rains in their time, and the land will give its produce... You will eat your bread to satiety and you will dwell securely in your land. I shall provide peace (shalom) in the land and you shall lie down at night without fear... A sword will not cross your land. You will pursue your enemies, and they will fall before you by the sword. Five of you will pursue a hundred and hundred of you will pursue ten thousand and your enemies will fall before you by the sword.." (Leviticus 26:1-8).

How can I possibly understand this text? On the one hand, the Bible guarantees that if we as an entire nation will follow the Biblical commandments in the land of Israel, the soil will provide you with the requisite nourishment and there will be peace- shalom – in the land; no sword will cross the land. But then, on the other hand in the very next verse, the Bible tells us that we will pursue our enemies with the sword and a hundred of our men will slay a thousand of the enemy. Is this a picture of shalom, of peace? Even if we are defeating our enemy by the sword, this does not mean that we have no casualties at all! This hardly suggests a cessation of the sword altogether!? In this context, what did the Bible mean in its earlier verse, "And I shall provide peace – shalom – in the land" (Leviticus 26:6)?

Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra provides the answer with his one word commentary on the word shalom, peace, "amongst yourselves," (benechem). The Bible is telling us that if we follow the commandments and live in peace and harmony amongst ourselves in Israel, if there be no swords of internecine civil wars within the nation, then we will be able to soundly defeat any enemy who might rise up from without to destroy us. Shalom means internal peace, the love of our Israelite siblings – which can only come after we vanquish our enemies roundabout!

This is a critical message – especially during this time of the year. The Sages of the Talmud teach us that we must waive weddings, haircuts and group festivities from Passover until Lag B'omer because 24,000 disciples of Rabbi Akiba died during this period; the Geonim explain that these disciples were killed during the abortive Bar Kochba rebellion against Rome. Their fatal flaw was their lack of respect for each other, because of which that generation was not worthy of the redemption Bar Kochba had been supposed to have brought about.

The lesson is the same: only if we Jews are at peace with each other internally will we be able to overcome our external enemies who threaten to destroy us. And even more to the point, our Biblical portion of Behukotai teaches that the primary meaning of the word shalom is peace within Israel; it is as if the Torah is teaching that our problems with the Palestinians are far more simple to work out than our problems with each other, within the family of Israel!

Now I believe we can resolve our initial query. The priestly benediction requests that "G-d bless you and keep you; G-d cause His face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you; G-d lift up His face towards you and grant you peace." The culmination of the benediction is shalom, peace. The Kohanim introduce the benediction by defining its most important feature: .."G-d has commanded us to bless His nation Israel with love" – not that the Kohanim must feel love whence they bless, but that their blessing for Israel is love, is that all of the Jews feel love for each other. Our nation must achieve the internal peace and brotherly love which will make Israel invincible vis a vis their enemies. This is our greatest challenge! ©2016 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

From a cursory review of this week's Torah reading, one can easily come to the conclusion that G-d's method for dealing with us is with earthly rewards and punishments. The blessings that appear in the reading are all physical, emotional and sometimes psychological. There is no mention of eternal life, the survival of the soul, and/or of the rewards in the World to Come.

And the same is true relative to the punishments and disasters, which are predicted to happen to the Jewish people when they stray from the path of G-d and righteousness. All of those punishments and tragedies, described in great and graphic detail, are events of this world and of its physical nature. Again, there is no mention of an afterlife judgment or of the concept of the punishment of the soul in a different sphere of existence.

All of this creates a great philosophical and theological conundrum of why good people oftentimes

suffer greatly in their lifetime and why, in the reverse, evil people many times seem to prosper and are never held accountable for their nefarious deeds. Though there is a biblical book – *Iyov* – that deals almost exclusively with this issue, in its conclusion it really affords no answer to the great question that it has raised.

It is only in the development of the Oral Law in Jewish tradition that the concept of the afterlife and of heavenly judgment of the soul is introduced. At the very least, this basic idea of Jewish faith is presented as a partial answer to the nagging question of why the righteous suffer in this world. Yet, it must be admitted that the literal written Torah speaks of reward and punishment as a purely physical matter that takes place in our actual physical world.

All of the great scholars of Israel throughout the ages have grappled with this issue and followed varied paths in attempting to deal with the matter. There are many factors, known and unknown, which determine the fate of an individual and of the nation. In effect, that is really the answer that the Lord, so to speak, addresses to *Iyov* regarding his complaints pertaining to the unfairness of life.

Heaven operates in this world on so many different levels that it is impossible for human beings to comprehend them all. The Torah presents reward and punishment in its simplest form and with the lowest common denominator possible. But it does not limit itself to our understanding of righteousness and evil. It simply sets forth that in this world, just as in the world of the afterlife and the spirit, the concept of reward and punishment governs.

We pray thrice daily to the kingdom of judgment. We live our lives based on the fact that we know that we are constantly being assessed and judged. Our ignorance of the details as to how this system functions, does not in any way belie our knowledge that it exists. It must be taken into account continually during our lives. ©2016 Rabbi Berel Wein - Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

"**A**nd if you do not listen to Me, and do not do all of these commandments, and if My statutes disgust you, and if My laws repulse your souls, so that you do not do all of My commandments, [thereby] undoing My covenant" (Vayikra 26:14-15). "And I will set My [angry] face upon you" (26:17). The consequences for not following G-d's commandments are severe, described at length, and in painful detail, here (26:14-44) and in D'varim (28:15-68). Ramban

(Vayikra 26:16 and D'varim 28:42) says that the first "tochacha" (rebuke) refers to the destruction of the First Temple and its aftermath, while the second refers to the destruction of the Second Temple and its aftermath. Others (see Kli Chemda, Ki Savo 3:5 and Nitzavim 3) have it the opposite way, with the "tochacha" in Vayikra referring to what happened when the Second Temple was destroyed and the "tochacha" in D'varim referring to the destruction of the First Temple. Each opinion breaks down the verses of both "tochachos" to show how they refer to either one of the Temple's destructions or the other.

Aside from the need to explain how each verse used as "proof" for one or the other can be explained by the other opinion, there is another issue that I'd like to address. How can the Torah lay out two separate "tochachos," each different enough that they could be said to refer to different eras? It's one thing to warn us about what will happen if we stray from the covenant, but laying it out twice, with different consequences based on specific circumstances, is not as simple. A "tochacha" designed for what will happen after we have already broken the covenant once, re-established it, and then broke it a second time, with punishments precise enough to match the nature of the original break, the reconciliation that followed, and the specific sins that led to another break in the covenant, make it seem as if it is a *fait accompli*. Were there no other possibilities in the way we broke the covenant either time, or how we reconciled with G-d in between, that one of these sets of punishments would have to fit the second breakage? What about free will, not just regarding whether the covenant will be broken, but how it was broken?

Previously (<http://tinyurl.com/gvlhwnn>) I discussed the nature of a covenant, specifically the covenant between us and G-d (and how it parallels the covenant protocol of the Ancient Near East.) In short, a covenant consists of three parts; the background that led the parties to make the covenant, the actual agreement between the parties (what each is obligated to do), and the consequences of breaking the covenant. Obviously, the "tochacha" makes up the third part, the consequences (see Vayikra 26:25 and D'varim 28:69). And keeping the commandments are our obligation (with G-d's obligation being to take care of us, to "be our G-d," and to consider us His "treasured nation"). What about the first part, the historical overview that explains why we are obligating ourselves to keep the mitzvos (etc.)? Rashi (Sh'mos 24:4 and 24:7) tells us that the "Book of the Covenant" that Moshe wrote down, and read to the nation, before they were asked whether they want to enter a covenant with G-d, consisted of the Torah "from B'reishis through the giving of the Torah, plus the mitzvos commanded at Marah." This was the background against which the covenant was being enacted; G-d being the Creator of

the world, the world's history prior to His choosing the Patriarchs as the foundation for the nation that would carry out His mission, the relationship between G-d and the Patriarchs and their descendants and what happened to them, including the nation's slavery in Egypt and His miraculously taking them out, and the commandments that were already in place. [Interestingly, another opinion regarding what the "Book of the Covenant" refers to (see Chizkuni on Sh'mos 24:7 and M'chilta Yisro 3) is the "tochacha" itself. Both were part of the covenant protocol; the only question is which part of the protocol constituted the "Book of the Covenant."]

When the covenant was restated on the Plains of Moav, these three elements were there as well, with Moshe repeating many of the laws that were part of our obligation (see Rashi on Vayikra 19:2) as well as concluding the process with another "tochacha." Although the historical overview that Moshe gave at the beginning of Sefer D'varim could very well qualify as the first part of the covenant protocol, I would suggest that when Moshe gave this overview, including referring to the covenant enacted at Sinai (see D'varim 4:13, 4:23 and 5:2-3) he was adding the rest of Sefer Sh'mos, as well as Sefer Vayikra and Sefer Bamidbar, to the "historical background" of the covenant being enacted. True, the covenant was essentially the same as the one made at Sinai (with the addition of "arvus," each member of the nation being responsible for the spiritual well-being of every other member of the nation -- see Sanhedrin 43b), but just as for the first enactment of the covenant the Torah up until that point was the focal point of the historic overview of what led to the covenant, for the restatement of the covenant on the Plains of Moav, the entire Torah, including what had transpired since Sinai, was the historic overview of what led to the reiteration of the covenant.

With the entire Torah being the historic overview of what led to the covenant at the Plains of Moav, the covenant that had been enacted at Sinai (which was still in full effect, including the consequences for not keeping it) was part of that overview. Had the nation gone into the Promised Land shortly after leaving Sinai (which was the plan until the sin of the spies), the only consequences for violating the covenant would have been those given in Vayikra. [This included the concept of "arvus," see Vayikra 26:37 and Sh'vuos 39a.] However, it would be decades until the nation would actually enter the Promised Land, and a lot happened in between, not the least of which was that it was the next generation that entered the Promised Land. These changes not only necessitated a reiteration of the covenant, but also a new set of consequences for not keeping it. The original set of consequences were still valid, and would apply in situations where breaking the covenant more closely mimicked the covenant being broken had the nation

entered the Promised Land right away (and were therefore included in the "overview" not just because it was part of the history that led to the covenant being reiterated, but because they could still happen). Nevertheless, additional consequences were now possible as well, and were therefore stated as the consequences for not being faithful to the covenant being enacted on the Plains of Moav.

Whether the destruction of the First Temple (or Second Temple) more closely resembled the consequences described at the covenant at Sinai or those described at the covenant on the Plains of Moav (or there were aspects of each in both of them), the need for a second "tochacha" was not necessarily because two Temples would be destroyed, with one "tochacha" for each destruction, but because the reiteration of the covenant on the Plains of Moav needed its own set of consequences. And because things were not the same as they had been before the turmoil in the desert occurred, the consequences were not exactly the same as when the covenant was enacted at Sinai. That they were the consequences of the Sinai covenant were part of our history, and therefore included in the covenant made on the Plains of Moav. And unfortunately, they became part of our real history when they became actual consequences as a punishment for our sins. But two separate "tochachos" became necessary because there were two separate covenant ceremonies, each requiring a full covenant protocol, not because there were two separate destructions.

It is appropriate that we read the "tochacha" from Vayikra shortly before the holiday at Shavuot, since it is "z'man matan Toraseinu," the time (of the year) that the Torah was given at Mt. Sinai, and this "tochacha" consists of the consequences of breaking the covenant made at Sinai. It is also appropriate that we read the "tochacha" in D'varim shortly before Rosh Hashana, when we are judged regarding how the forthcoming year will be, as these consequences were not part of an historical overview of what led to a reiteration of our covenant with G-d, but what would happen to us if we break the covenant. ©2016 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI MORDECHAI WILLIG

Torah, Emunah & Bracha

"If you will go in [the way of] My laws" (Vayikra 26:3), the opening phrase of parshas Bechukosai, is interpreted by Rashi, "she't'hi'yu ameilim baTorah -- that you should be laboring in the Torah". Conversely, Rashi explains the opening phrase of the curses, "If you will not listen to Me" (26:14), as referring to not laboring in the Torah.

The pivotal and critical distinction between the behavior of Am Yisrael which deserves blessing and the behavior which results in the horrific curses of the

tochacha is whether we are ameilim baTorah or not. If we do labor in Torah, and, as a result, "observe My commandments and perform them" (26:3), we are blessed with bounty, peace, victory, fertility, and the spiritual rewards of the Bais Hamikdash and Gan Eden (26:4-12).

The causes of the curses, according to Rashi (16:14), are "seven sins, the first brings on the second, and so forth until the seventh. They are the following: He did not study [i.e. labor intensely in the Torah], he did not perform [the mitzvos], he despises others who perform [the mitzvos], he hates the [Torah] scholars, he prevents others [from performing mitzvos], he denies the mitzvos, he denies Hashem". This progression, from bitul Torah to k'fira, from a failure to labor in Torah to outright atheism, has tragic consequences. But how does one lead to the other?

Rav Eliyahu Dessler (Michtav Me'Eliyahu vol. 3, pg. 177) provides a crucial insight: inner faith comes as a result of learning Torah in depth, not by abstract speculation and philosophy. Human reason is "bribed" by all types of personal interests (negi'os); desire leads reason to wherever it wishes. Relying on one's own independent human reason is comparable to someone going to a judge that he bribed in order that the judge will rule for him as he wishes. As such, one who says "I will only accept what I understand" can never apprehend the truth because he is swayed by his desires. Instead of building on our own subjective and limited human reason, our faith must be firmly rooted in the Torah tradition (mesorah) received from previous generations, and on learning Torah and recognizing its greatness and the greatness of our Sages. Only one who is rooted in, and subservient to, the Torah, as explained by mesorah, can attempt to apprehend the fundamentals of faith rationally.

This insight of Rav Dessler explains how a failure to learn Torah in depth can lead to heresy. Laboring in the Torah for its own sake yields clarity that Hashem gave the Torah at Sinai, and joy similar to when Torah was given at Sinai (ibid pg. 176, based on Talmud Yerushalmi, Chagiga 2:1).

"Do not stray after your hearts" (Bamidbar 15:39) refers to heresy (Berachos 12b). Hashem implanted within man the quality of curiosity in order to drive us towards deep learning of Torah. However, we may not be curious to learn about heresy. Our evil inclination misuses our curiosity to lead us to heresy, and even idolatry, so that sexual immorality is permitted publically (Sanhedrin 63b). To overcome this, one should reinforce one's simple faith based on tradition, and labor incessantly in Torah (pg. 178-9).

Today we are witness to an exponential increase in the labor of Torah, in numbers unprecedented in the post-Talmudic era (see Rambam, introduction to Mishne Torah). We must constantly thank Hashem for this phenomenon, and the attendant

blessings, relative to our recent past, of bounty, peace, victory, and fertility.

At the same time, sadly, unprecedented numbers of Jews are being lost to assimilation and intermarriage, as the progression of the seven sins highlighted by Rashi continues to play out before our eyes. Even affiliated Jews, including even some who identify as Orthodox, are involved in some of the negative actions and attitudes which are listed amongst those sins, and are progressing down the destructive path towards assimilation and the concomitant curses. Simple, unquestioning emunah (faith) in the eternity and morality of the Torah is being derided, even among observant Jews, by proponents of the postmodern zeitgeist described and anticipated by Chazal in Sanhedrin (63b) and by Rav Dessler.

It remains for the faithful to strengthen our faith and labor in Torah. May we thereby merit the continued and enhanced worldly brachos, and, ultimately, the eschatological ones as well. ©2016 Rabbi M. Willig and TorahWeb.org

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

The blessings in the portion of Behukotai reach toward their crescendo with the words "and I will walk among you and will be your G-d, and you shall be My people." (Leviticus 26:13) This penultimate gift that is promised is not a material one, it is rather a spiritual one that has extraordinary benefits.

Having G-d among us is a necessary prerequisite for the world to be ethical. After all, in bringing G-d back into the world, one makes a commitment to the ethical laws - the seven Noahide laws and their offshoots. (See Nachmanides, Genesis 34: 13) No doubt, even without G-d, there can be individuals who live very ethical lives. Yet, for the world at large to be ethical, G-d's presence is critical. Without G-d, ethics would be based on human reason which can be relative. Philosophies borne out of human reason can often emerge that declare ethical, what we certainly know to be unethical. But an ethical system based on G-d's laws is inviolate and can never be altered.

G-d's presence is also a crucial antidote to personal suffering. The price of living is that all of us, at one time or another, must suffer. The question is not why do we hurt; rather the question is, when feeling pain, do we sense the presence of G-d, a presence which makes even the difficult moments livable.

As we all know, sickness is part of the fabric of life. This world is not made up of the sick and the well, but of the sick and the not yet sick. The worst part of sickness is being alone in sickness. How I remember being wheeled into the hospital room for bypass surgery. At a particular moment, my loving family had no choice but to leave my side. As I was placed on the

surgical table, I felt alone, so deeply alone. But right then I sensed the closeness of G-d. If you feel G-d, then even in difficult times, when it might seem that G-d is acting kindly, you still sense the closeness of the Divine.

From a mystical perspective, connecting with G-d makes G-d fully one. The masters of Kabbalah argue that G-d above is separated from the part of G-d which is in each of us. In this approach, the inner G-dliness we all possess intrinsically yearns to reunite with G-d above, like a lover seeking out the beloved. The Kabbalists argue that only when the image of G-d in all of humankind fuses with the G-d above, does G-d, as He is manifest in this world, become one. In the words of the prophet Zachariah, "on that day, the Lord will be one and his name will be one." (14:9) The implication is that until that point, G-d, as He is present in the world, is not yet one.

Too often it is the case that we measure blessings by material benefits. What the Torah suggests is that the highest blessing is Divine accompaniment, an accompaniment that guides us with a sense of our ethical mission and a feeling of love and spiritual comfort. ©2016 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale.

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Yom Yerushalayim

*Translated for the Encyclopedia Talmudit
by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss*

Though all the land of Israel was divided amongst the *Shvatim*, the city of Jerusalem is owned by all Jews and therefore no one has a private stake in it. This only applies to the land itself and not to the structures that are built on it. Those buildings belong to the people who built these structures.

The communal ownership of the city of *Yerushalayim* has certain interesting laws such as:

1. Because those who make the pilgrimage to *Yerushalyim* are also owners of the land, they cannot be charged rent for their stay. However the owners of the property where they would stay would benefit in other ways such as they would receive the skins of the sacrifices. Today one must of course pay if they would stay at a Hotel in *Yerushalayim*, since the land was bought from non-Jews and they have no commitment to the people who make the pilgrimages to the land of Israel on the three festivals.

2. In the entire land of Israel one is prohibited to have a balcony that extends into public domain. To do this it must be in one's own domain. However in *Yerushalayim* one is not even permitted to build this balcony even in his own domain because the land belongs to all.

3. Another law special to *Yerushalyim* is that one cannot erect furnaces. In essence this law is for all cities that one can only build furnaces fifty *Amot* (cubits) from the city. However since *Yerushalayim* belongs to all, without this specific law of fifty *Amot* one would think that furnaces is permitted everywhere in *Yerushalayim*. ©2016 Rabbi M. Weiss and *Encyclopedia Talmudit*



MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Mordechai Greenberg

Rosh Yeshiva, Kerem B'Yavne

Translated by Moshe Goldberg

"The Land of your Enemies will Devour You" [Vayikra 26:38] The above verse is referring not merely to physical defeat but also to a loss of national identity. The Meshech Chochma comments, "They will think that Berlin is Jerusalem." And this indeed is the harshest difficulty of the exile -- when many people are convinced in philosophical or religious terms that after the destruction of the Temple the Jews have become nothing more than citizens of the lands in which they live, and that the only thing which is characteristic of them is the performance of the mitzvot. People called themselves "Germans of the Mosaic faith." The following are some examples that show how far matters went.

- The Chief Rabbi of the Liberal Jews of Hungary wrote: "Political Zionism which wants to establish a Jewish state in Eretz Yisrael is in my opinion dangerous spiritual madness... The Zionist movement, which wants to transform Judaism from a religious sect into a nation, will never succeed in Hungary. We are Hungarians of the Jewish faith. Jewish nationalism does not exist. Everybody agrees to this, including the modern and Orthodox sectors." The same opinion was also voiced by the Orthodox rabbi.

- The Rabbinical Council of Germany also published a declaration, which stated as follows: "The aspirations of those who are called 'Zionists' to establish a national Jewish state in Eretz Yisrael are in

conflict with the messianic mission of Judaism, as is included in the holy books and in later religious sources."

- According to the Chief Rabbi of Paris, "The Jewish nation is dead. The nationalistic framework is dead. But what has not died and will never die is the Jewish spirit."

- The Jewish philosopher Hermann Cohen wrote that Zionism "is an insult to the patriotism of the Jews, who feel at home (in Germany). Both politically and emotionally, they feel that they are in their homeland... In all matters related to our spiritual lives we have a strong feeling of religious partnership that is closer than the relationship between Jewish messianic feeling and German humanism. Therefore, our feelings towards Germany and its people carries with it a character of close allegiance which is so strong that it is almost an expression of religious fervor."

- Many Jewish soldiers fought in the First World War. In a book that the German army published about letters sent by Jewish soldiers who fell in the war, the Minister of Defense at the time, Franz Josef Strauss, wrote the following in the introduction: "Reading these letters reveals a love for the homeland and patriotism which has long been lost to us."

Moreover, in their letters from the front the Jewish soldiers who fought for Germany showed a deep-felt love for the homeland which is hard for us to understand at all in this day and age."

With this in mind, a Chassidic Rebbe came to the conclusion that it is easier to take the Jews out of exile than to take the exile out of the Jews. In this spirit, Theodore Herzl wrote, "Veteran prisoners do not have any desire to leave their prison." Herzl's assistant in London, Israel Zangwill, wrote, "Anti-Zionism can be hidden very easily under a mask of philosophy and it can wrap itself in religion, but it is really nothing more than the behavior of the prisoner who is hidden within each and every one of us, which has become our second nature. It is the yellow star which we were forced to wear for hundreds of years, and it remains to this day, sewn onto the lapels of our souls."

RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ

Dvar Torah

The Torah states: "If you will follow My decrees and observe My commandments and perform them" (Lev. 26:3). The literal translation of the verse is "If you will walk in my decrees." Rabbi Simcha Bunim of P'shis'che pointed out that whereas the heavenly angels do not progress in holiness and remain forever in the state in which they were created, man should not remain static, but instead advance in spirituality every day of his life. This is what the prophet means: "If you walk in My ways and safeguard My charge, I shall permit you movement among these immobile (angels)" (Zechariah 3:7). G-d has enabled us to have

"movement," i.e. to grow in spirituality in contrast to angels that remain stationary.

The fact is that there is no standing in one place. If we are derelict in advancing ourselves spiritually, this failure sets us back and we regress spiritually. We are constantly in movement. If we do not move forward, we are slipping backward. The wording of the Torah is precise. It is not enough to simply observe the mitzvos (commandments). We must do so in a way that we progress in spirituality. *Dvar Torah from Twerski on Chumash by Rabbi Abraham J. Twerski, M.D.* © 2003 Rabbi K. Packouz and aish.com

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

Parshat Bechukotai begins by Hashem (G-d) proclaiming, "if you will walk in My decrees and observe My commandments..." (26:3), then 1) the rains will come in their season, 2) trees will bear fruit, 3) you will have bread, 4) there will be peace in the land, and 5) a sword will not pass through the land. Rashi (noted commentary) explains that "walking with My decrees" means that we should toil in understanding the decrees of the Torah. Although Rashi addresses the seemingly incorrect syntax of "walking" in laws, Rashi doesn't explain how walking/toiling in the Torah is accomplished, nor does it explain how the rewards correlate to the toiling or performance of the commandment (a common rule throughout the Torah).

A possible explanation could be a metaphorical reference to walking, telling us that it's not enough to sit back, read the Torah like a book, rather that we should pace and ponder every bit of the Torah, and never be satisfied with not knowing what, how, or why something is done. So why does the Torah list THESE specific rewards for making an effort to understand the Torah? Well, don't just read this thought, ponder the questions (possible answer may include the educational benefits of others seeing you care enough to look for answers)...
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