

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS**

### Covenant & Conversation

**T**his week we read the Tochecha, the terrifying curses warning of what would happen to Israel if it betrayed its Divine mission. We read a prophecy of history gone wrong. If Israel loses its way spiritually, say the curses, it will lose physically, economically, and politically also. The nation will experience defeat and disaster. It will forfeit its freedom and its land. The people will go into exile and suffer persecution. Customarily we read this passage in the synagogue sotto voce, in an undertone, so fearful is it. It is hard to imagine any nation undergoing such catastrophe and living to tell the tale. Yet the passage does not end there. In an abrupt change of key, we then hear one of the great consolations in the Bible: "Yet in spite of this, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not cast them away... I will for their sakes remember the covenant of their ancestors, whom I brought forth out of Egypt in the sight of the heathen, that I might be their God: I am the Lord." (Lev. 26:44-45)

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

Hope is one of the very greatest Jewish contributions to Western civilisation, so much so that I have called Judaism "the voice of hope in the conversation of humankind." (Future Tense, 231-252) In the ancient world, there were tragic cultures in which people believed that the gods were at best indifferent to our existence, at worst actively malevolent. The best humans can do is avoid their attention or appease their wrath. In the end, though, it is all in vain. We are destined to see our dreams wrecked on the rocks of reality. The great tragedians were Greek. Judaism produced no Sophocles or Aeschylus, no Oedipus or Antigone. Biblical Hebrew did not even contain a word that meant "tragedy" in the Greek sense. Modern Hebrew had to borrow the word: hence, tragedia.

Then there are secular cultures, like that of the contemporary West in which the very existence of the universe, of human life and consciousness, is seen as

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

Judaism is not without an expression of this mood. We find it in the opening chapters of the book of Ecclesiastes. For its author, time is cyclical. What has been, will be. History is a set of eternal recurrences. Nothing ever really changes: "What has been will be again, / What has been done will be done again; / There is nothing new under the sun." (Eccl. 1:9)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Where does hope come from? Berger sees it as a constitutive part of our humanity: "Human existence is always oriented towards the future. Man exists by constantly extending his being into the future, both in his consciousness and in his activity... An essential dimension of this 'futura' of man is hope. It is through hope that men overcome the difficulties of any given here and now. And it is through hope that men find meaning in the face of extreme suffering." (Peter

Berger, op. cit., 68-69)

Only hope empowers us to take risks, engage in long-term projects, marry and have children, and refuse to capitulate in the face of despair: "There seems to be a death-refusing hope at the very core of our humanitas. While empirical reason indicates that this hope is an illusion, there is something in us that, however shamefacedly in an age of triumphant rationality, goes on saying 'no!' and even says 'no!' to the ever so plausible explanations of empirical reason. In a world where man is surrounded by death on all sides, he continues to be a being who says 'no!' to death -- and through this 'no!' is brought to faith in another world, the reality of which would validate his hope as something other than illusion." (Ibid., 72)

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

History as conceived in this parsha is not utopian. Faith does not blind us to the apparent randomness of circumstance, the cruelty of fortune, or the seeming injustices of fate. No one reading Leviticus 26 can be an optimist. Yet no one sensitive to its message can abandon hope. Without this, Jews and Judaism would not have survived. Without belief in the covenant and its insistence, "Yet in spite of this," there might have been no Jewish people after the destruction of one or other of the Temples, or the Holocaust itself. It is not too much to say that Jews kept hope alive, and hope kept the Jewish people alive. *Covenant and Conversation 5779 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l ©2019 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org*

**RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

## Shabbat Shalom

"**A**nd 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 Behukkotai 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.

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 halla (hametz) 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 hametz 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 convert to Judaism. 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, and for the sanctification of every aspect of our lives and our natures. ©2019 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

#### **RABBI BEREL WEIN**

### **Wein Online**

**T**he final portion of this third book of the Torah contains an ominous tone. This is because of the vivid description of evil events that will befall the Jewish people when they desert their Godly mission and sink to the level of the societies that surround and outnumber them. The Torah promises us that such behavior and attitudes will surely lead to disaster, exile and persecution from the very societies that the Jews try to emulate.

All Jewish history bears testimony to the accuracy of the words that exist in this week's portion of the Torah. And the way the Torah presents these events, which will occur in the future, is not in the necessary framework of punishment but rather in the inevitable picture of events that inexorably lead to consequences. It is not God Himself, so to speak, that is punishing the Jewish people but rather it is the Jewish people itself that is doing the punishing. This is a logical and even an evitable result of past behavior and misguided attitudes and beliefs. This is a very important lesson for Jews to understand.

Behavior, speech, attitudes and beliefs always have consequences in the real world in which we live. They are not to be taken lightly and not to be shrugged off as just being examples of the fallible nature of human beings. We are not allowed to dig a hole under our seat in the boat. The words of the prophet Jeremiah ring true today as they did thousands of years ago: "the

fathers ate sour grapes and therefore the children of later generations will have their teeth set on edge." One has to be blind to history or even to current events not to realize the lessons involved and described in this week's Torah portion.

The Torah will expand upon this much later towards the end of the fifth book of the Torah. We will be presented with a full and graphic picture of the cruelty of humanity towards the Jewish people over the centuries until our day. Rabbi Moshe Ben Nachman in his commentary to Torah explains that this week's portion and its predictions referred to the destruction of the first Temple and the relatively short exile of the Jewish people after that in Babylonia.

The later section, towards the end of the Torah, refers to the destruction of the second Temple and the long and seemingly endless exile that follows upon its demise. The latter exile, which was, and to a certain extent still is, a long and difficult one to endure, one that has cost countless generations of Jews their lives and their futures and others their spiritual heritage and legacy, seems to have little if any redeeming features.

And yet the remarkable fact of Jewish history is the vitality and productivity of the Jewish people in exile, suffering persecution and living under adverse circumstances. This resilience is also reflected in the prophecies of the Torah regarding the eternity of the Jewish people and its eventual return to both its physical national heritage and spiritual greatness. ©2019 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](http://www.rabbiwein.com). For more information on these and other products visit [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com)

#### **RABBI AVI WEISS**

### **Shabbat Forshpeis**

**T**he blessings in the portion of Behukotai reach toward their crescendo with the words "and I will walk among you and will be your God, 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 God among us is a necessary prerequisite for the world to be ethical. After all, in bringing God 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 God, there can be individuals who live very ethical lives. Yet, for the world at large to be ethical, God's presence is critical. Without God, 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 God's laws is inviolate and can never be altered.

God'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 God, 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 God. If you feel God, then even in difficult times, when it might seem that God is acting kindly, you still sense the closeness of the Divine.

From a mystical perspective, connecting with God makes God fully one. The masters of Kabbalah argue that God above is separated from the part of God which is in each of us. In this approach, the inner Godliness we all possess intrinsically yearns to reunite with God above, like a lover seeking out the beloved. The Kabbalists argue that only when the image of God in all of humankind fuses with the God above, does God, 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, God, 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. ©2019 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

#### **RABBI DAVID LEVINE**

### **Focus on the Rewards**

**P**arasha Bechukotai is most known for the Tochacha, the series of curses which will befall the Jewish people if they do not follow the laws of Hashem in the Land of Israel. These are preceded by a series of brachot, blessings, for those who observe the Torah in the land. Though these blessings are significantly shorter than the tochacha, it is clear that their bounty easily surpasses the curses in quality and quantity.

"If you will go in My statutes and observe My commandments and perform them. Then I will provide your rains in their time and the land will give its produce and the tree in the field will give its fruit. Threshing will overtake vintage for you and the vintage will last until the sowing, you will eat your bread to satiety and you

will dwell securely in your land. And I will provide peace in the land, and you will lie down with none to frighten you, I will cause wild beasts to withdraw from the land and a sword will not cross into your land. And you will pursue your enemies and they will fall before you by the sword. Five among you will pursue one hundred and one hundred from among you will pursue ten thousand, and your enemies will fall before you by the sword. And I will turn to you I will make you fruitful and increase you and I will establish My covenant with you. And you will eat that which is very old and remove the old to make way for the new. I will place My Mishkan in your midst and My soul will not purge itself of you. And I will cause Myself to walk among you, I will be your Elokim and you will be a people unto Me. I am Hashem your Elokim Who took you out of the land of Egypt from being slaves unto them, I broke the pegs of your yoke and I led you erect."

HaRav Shmshon Raphael Hirsch sees our first responsibility as a process in achieving our possessions and enjoyments but within the framework of Hashem's laws. One must work diligently to understand them. Rashi speaks of this study as struggling in the Torah. The use of the word "you shall guard" emphasizes that it is not enough to learn the laws but one must teach them to others.

The Ramban suggests that Hashem begins the rewards with g'shamim, rains, as Man's health and well-being depend on those rains. "The air is pure and good and the springs and rivers are good [clear]." Rains are a primary cause of physical health. "People do not become sick, and 'none shall miscarry, nor be barren', even among the cattle, and they will live out [the full extent of] their days.... Thus this [blessing – the rains in their season] is the greatest of all blessings [and therefore it is given first place]." Rashi understands the meaning of rain "in its time", to indicate that the rain will fall in the correct season and at a time that will not inconvenience people. It will fall on a Friday night when most people will not be leaving their homes. Hirsch expresses the idea that Hashem's promise to the B'nei Yisrael is not simply permitting the rains to fall naturally. Hashem has designed the Nature of the land differently than other lands. In Israel, Hashem controls the weather and Nature and brings forth the rain as a unique reward for Man's behavior towards mitzvot.

The concept of a never-ending harvest speaks of an abundance that clearly shows the hand of Hashem in its miraculous nature. We are reminded of the curse of the land at the time of Adam and the effort that he would be forced to exert in order to coax food from the land. Even though strides had been made in agriculture, Man was still burdened with the hazards of famine and disease in his crops. The description of continuous harvest and continuous productive work made clear to the people that "you will eat your bread to

satiety and you will dwell securely in your land." HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin explains that the people will be so occupied studying Torah, performing mitzvot, and working in their fields, that there will be no time for them to be tempted to sin.

HaRav Sorotzkin explains that the promise of peace is greater than the promise of dwelling securely in your land. He quotes Yeshaya (32:17), "And the work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurances forever." Acts of righteousness are better than giving tz'dakah as these will bring about peace which is greater than quiet. The Ramban explains that according to Rabbi Yehudah wild beasts will not enter the land because the cities will be filled with people and wild beasts do not wish to go where there is a large population. According to Rabbi Shimon, it is the "evil of the beasts" that will disappear. It is not the beast that is a threat to Man but the sins of Man which cause wild animals to react.

Hashem continues His promise with the protection from our enemies. Our Rabbis explain that our enemies will fall on their own swords so that our fighting will be minimal. Their fear will cause them to abandon their attacks on us and flee as we pursue them. The Torah tells us that five will pursue a hundred men and a hundred men will pursue ten thousand. HaRav Sorotzkin explains that the strength of combining forces enables the many to pursue an even greater percentage of our enemies. He quotes HaRav Eliezer Gordon, the Rosh Yeshivah of Telz, who explains that when two people learn together, they each get the reward of their own learning as well as of their partner in learning. This learning with a Chevruta, a partner, enables even greater strength to come out of that learning. The mitzvah of protecting each other by fighting against our enemies together enables that exponential strength when done in greater

The final reward is a two-fold one, the building of the Temple and Hashem's dwelling among us. HaRav Sorotzkin compares Man to workers in Hashem's orchards. Those who are wicked eat from the orchards while they are harvesting. They will have their fill but there will be nothing left for their portion when the harvest is done. The righteous, however, harvest the fruit completely and only take their share as their Master has commanded after the harvest is completed. They will have their full share in the World to Come. May we be worthy of both the reward of the building of the Third Temple and a full share in the World to Come. ©2019 Rabbi D. Levine

#### ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

## Yom Yerushalayim

*Translated for the Encyclopedia Talmudit  
by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss*

**T**hough all the land of Israel was divided amongst the *Shavtim*, 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*



**RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY**

## A Separate Peace

**"**If you will walk in my statutes, and heed my commandments..." (Leviticus 33:3). This week the Torah bestows its promise of blessing and peace to those who follow in the path of Torah. Rashi is bothered by the seeming redundancy of walking in statutes, and heeding commands. He explains that "walk in my statutes" refers to arduous Torah study, and "heed my commandments" refers to keeping the mitzvot.

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

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

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

Rav Shach once entered a shul and sat down in a seat towards the back, and, while waiting for the minyan to begin, Rav Shach began to study Torah. Suddenly a man approached him, hands on his hips, and began shouting at him.

"Don't you know that you are sitting in my seat?" the irate man yelled.

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

Rav Shach quickly stood up and embraced the man. He hugged him lovingly as he begged the man for forgiveness. He agreed to the irate man's every point.

"I am so sorry for taking your seat even if it was for a few moments," he pleaded. Please forgive me. I must have absent-mindedly sat down there. Please forgive me.

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

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

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

We think of peace as a concept that occurs between nations. However, we often forget that what we need is peace within our own community. A separate peace. ©2019 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & torah.org

**RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ**

## Shabbat Shalom Weekly

**T**he Torah states: "And a man shall stumble upon his brother..." (Leviticus 26:37). Rashi cites the Sifra (a midrash) which explains this verse thus: "One shall stumble through the iniquity of another, for all the people of Israel are responsible for each other."

Rabbi Yisroel Meir Kagan, the Chofetz Chaim, related the following analogy: Mr. Cohen loaned Mr. Green a large sum of money. Mr. Shapiro agreed to guarantee the loan; he would pay Mr. Cohen if Mr. Green will be unable to pay. If Mr. Green were investing his money in a business that was sure to lose money, Mr. Shapiro would definitely do everything in his power to prevent Mr. Green from becoming involved in that business. Mr. Shapiro knows that if Mr. Green wastes his money, the obligation to repay the loan will be his.

"The same applies to preventing others from transgressing," said the Chofetz Chaim. "If someone has the ability to stop another person from transgressing and fails to do so, he is held liable for that offense. Therefore, we must do everything we can to prevent transgressions." *Dvar Torah based on Love Your Neighbor by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin ©2019 Rabbi K. Packouz & aish.com*

**YESHIVAT HAR ETZION**

## Virtual Beit Medrash

STUDENT SUMMARIES OF SICHOT OF THE ROSHEI YESHIVA BASED ON A SICHA OF HARAV YEHUDA AMITAL ZT"L  
Summarized by Rav Eliyahu Blumenzweig  
Translated by Kaeren Fish

**"**If you walk in my statutes... I will give your rains at their proper time, and the land will give of its produce and the tree of the field will give its fruit." (Vayikra 23:3-4) We may ask ourselves, what is so special about this blessing promised to us if we walk in God's statutes? After all, is it not natural -- the accepted, expected way of the world -- that the land gives of its produce and that the trees give of their fruit?

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

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

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

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

By means of correcting the primal sin man will return to a state where he will no longer constantly live in fear of natural disasters. He will not sow the seeds of his new crop with trepidation, he will no longer walk about fearing wild animals. "And I shall make a covenant with them on that day with the animals of the field and with the birds of the sky and with the creeping creatures of the earth, and I will break the bow and the sword and war from the earth, and I shall lay them down in peace" (Hoshea 2:20).

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

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

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

To date we have not yet merited this berakha in its entirety. But in the meantime we can attempt to apply it in relation to what is written in the first part of the verse, and Chazal's commentary: "If you walk in My statutes -- that you should toil diligently in Torah." Sometimes a person senses that he is not at one with

the Torah; he feels that he is waging a constant battle for conquest and control, and he feels helpless. A person is obligated to work towards perfecting himself, at least to the point where one battle -- the question of whether or not he is at one with the Torah -- no longer bothers him. A person must feel himself within the world of Torah, and within this world he can wage the battle for better and more profound understanding, for deeper and more all-encompassing comprehension. But all of this must be based on the feeling that he is "living Torah," not fighting the Torah from outside, not fighting over whether or not to enter the Beit Midrash. Within this embrace of life he can continue in his struggle towards perfection. (*Originally delivered on Leil Shabbat, Parashat Bechukotai 5733.*)

**RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER**

## Weekly Dvar

**P**arshat 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 metaphoric 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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