

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

The late Maurice and Vivienne Wohl were one of the most remarkable couples I ever met. They were a study in contrasts. Maurice was quiet, introspective, reflective and reserved. Vivienne was outgoing and vivacious, a people person in the truest sense. They complemented one another perfectly: two halves of a whole.

What made them special, outwardly, was that they were givers on a monumental scale. In Israel, for example, they donated the 19-acre rose garden next to the Knesset and the striking Daniel Libeskind-designed cultural centre at Bar Ilan University. They endowed medical facilities in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, as well as at King's College and University College, London. They supported Jewish schools in Britain and yeshivot in Israel -- and all this hardly touches the surface of their philanthropy.

What was really moving, though, was how they became a couple in the first place, because Vivienne was thirty years younger than Maurice. When they met, Maurice was in his late forties, a dedicated businessman seemingly destined for a life of bachelorhood. Vivienne, not yet 20, was the daughter of friends of Maurice who had asked whether she could work for him during a vacation.

One day, Maurice offered to take her for lunch. On their way to the restaurant, they passed a beggar in the street. Maurice gave him a coin, and walked on. Vivienne stopped and asked Maurice if he would be kind enough to give her in advance a substantial sum -- she named the figure -- from this week's wages. Maurice handed over the money. She then walked back and gave it all to the beggar. "Why did you do that?" asked Maurice. "Because what you gave him was not enough to make a change to his life. He needed something more."

When the week came to an end, Maurice said to Vivienne, "I am not going to give you your full wages this week, because you gave away part of the money as a mitzvah and I do not want to rob you of it." But it was then that he decided that he must marry her, because, as he told me shortly before he died, "Her heart was bigger than mine."

I tell this story because it illustrates a dimension of parshat Behar we often miss. Leviticus 25 deals with

a problem that is as acute today as it was 33 centuries ago. It is about the inevitable inequalities that arise in every free market economy. Market economics is good at the creation of wealth but bad at its distribution. Whatever the starting point, inequalities emerge early on between the more and less successful, and they become more pronounced over time.¹

Economic inequality leads to inequality of power, and the result is often the abuse of the weak by the strong. This is a constant refrain of the prophets. Amos speaks of those who "sell the innocent for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes; who trample on the heads of the poor as on the dust of the ground, and deny justice to the oppressed"(Amos 2:6-7). Isaiah cries, "Woe to those who make unjust laws and issue oppressive decrees... making widows their prey and robbing the fatherless" (Is. 10:1-2). Micah inveighs against people who "covet fields and seize them, houses and take them away; they oppress householder and house, people and their inheritance" (Micah 2:1-2).

This is a problem for almost every society and age. What makes the Torah distinctive is that it refuses a one-dimensional answer to what is a genuinely complex problem. Equality is a value, but so too is freedom. Communism and socialism have been tried and failed; but the free market generates its discontents also. One principle that can be inferred from Tanakh is that the market was made to serve human beings; human beings were not made to serve the market. The fundamental question is therefore: what best serves humanity under the sovereignty of God?

A careful reading of Behar reveals that the Torah's approach to this question operates at three completely different levels. One is political, a second is psychological, and the third is theological.

The first level is simple. Behar proposes two cycles of redistribution, Shemittah and Yovel, the seventh and fiftieth year. The intent here is to restore a



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¹ This is the argument of Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the 21st Century*, Harvard University Press, 2014

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level playing field through a combination of debt remission, liberation of slaves, and the return of ancestral land to its original owners. This is a way of redressing accumulated inequalities without constant intervention in the economy. That is the political dimension.

The psychological dimension is what the French revolutionaries called fraternity. Ten times the laws in Behar use the word "brother." "Do not wrong your brother." "If your brother becomes poor." "The nearest redeemer shall come and redeem what his brother has sold." This is sound evolutionary logic. We know from the work of W. D. Hamilton and others on kin selection that the most basic driver of altruism is the family. We make sacrifices most readily for those most closely related to us.

That, in no small measure, is why from the beginning of the Jewish story to today, Jews have thought of themselves as a single family, descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel and Leah. It is one thing to legislate altruism, through such institutions as the seventh and fiftieth year. It is another to frame a society in such a way as to make people feel bound together in an unbreakable bond of shared responsibility. Hence the narratives of Genesis, focused overwhelmingly on the people of Israel not as a nation but as a family. Law and narrative here go hand in hand. Because the entire Jewish people is a single vastly extended family, therefore we must help when one of our brothers or sisters becomes destitute. This is ethnicity in the service of morality.

Finally, though, and most profoundly comes the theological dimension. For it is here, in Lev. 25, that we hear with unparalleled lucidity what I believe to be the single most fundamental principle of biblical law. Listen carefully to these two passages, the first about land, the second about Hebrew slaves: "The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is Mine: you are strangers and sojourners with me." (v. 23)

"If your brother becomes poor and sells himself to you, you shall not work him as a slave...For they are My servants whom I brought out of the land of Egypt; they shall not be sold as slaves. You shall not rule over him ruthlessly but shall fear your God." (vv. 39-43)

The Torah is making a radical point. There is

no such thing as absolute ownership. There is to be no freehold in the land of Israel because the land belongs ultimately to God. Nor may an Israelite own another Israelite because we all belong to God, and have done so ever since He brought our ancestors out of slavery in Egypt.

It is this principle that alone makes sense of the Torah's narrative of the creation of the universe. The Torah is not a book of science. It is a book of law. That is what the word "Torah" means. It follows that the opening chapter of the Torah is not a scientific account but a legal one. It is not an answer to the question, "How was the universe born?" It is an answer to a different question entirely: "By what right does God command human beings?" The answer is: because He created the universe. Therefore He owns the universe. Therefore He is entitled to lay down the conditions on which He permits us to inhabit the universe. This is the basis of all biblical law. God rules not by might but by right -- the right of a creator vis--vis his creation.

Nowhere is this clearer than in parshat Behar, where it becomes the basis of legislation about land ownership and slavery. Jewish law rests on the principle that only God owns anything. What we possess, we do not own but merely hold in trust. That is why the concept of tzedek/tzedakah is untranslatable into English, because it means both justice and charity. In English, justice and charity are radically different. We do justice because we must; we give charity because we may. If I give you £1,000 because I owe it to you, that is justice. If I give you the same amount because I owe you nothing but I think you need it, that is charity. An act may be one or the other but not both.

In Judaism, by contrast, what we possess is not ours. It belongs to God. He has merely placed it in our safekeeping. We are looking after it on behalf of God. One of the conditions of that trust is that if we have more than we need, we should share it with those who have less than they need. That is tzedakah: justice and charity combined.

That was how Maurice and Vivienne Wohl lived their lives. God had given Maurice success, and he knew that the wealth he had accumulated was not really his at all. God had given it to him to look after, trusting that he would use it wisely to enhance the lives of others. Maurice, though, was honest enough to realise that he was probably better at making money than giving it away, and that if he did not give it away to people and causes that needed it, he was failing in his duty to God and his fellow humans. That is why, when he met Vivienne and saw how sensitively she understood the needs of others and how willing she was to make sacrifices for them, he knew he had to marry her. So, throughout their almost 40 years together, they used the blessings God had given them to bring blessings into other people's lives. It was a privilege to know them.

The larger truth of Parshat Behar is that you cannot create a just society by political measures alone (debt remission, restoration of ancestral property and so on). There are psychological and theological dimensions that are also vital.

But at a simple personal level, it contains a genuinely life-changing idea. Think of what you possess not as something you own but as something you hold in trust for the benefit, not only of you and your family, but also of others. In life, ask not, "what can I gain?" But "what can I give?" You will travel more lightly and with greater joy. You will enhance the lives of others. You will feel that your life has been worthwhile. Hardly any of us can give on the scale of a Maurice or Vivienne Wohl, but when it comes to giving, scale does not matter. Be a blessing to others and you will find that life has been a blessing to you. *Covenant and Conversation 5778 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l ©2018 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org*

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"**R**he land must not be sold permanently, because the land is mine and you reside in my land as foreigners and strangers". (Lev.25:23) "You must not defile the Land upon which you live and in the midst of which I (God) dwell, since I (God), dwell in the midst of the children of Israel" (Numbers 35:34) The sacred Zohar teaches that the nation Israel, the Torah, and the Holy One Blessed be He are one. This suggests that the eternal God may be experienced and apprehended through those phenomena which are also perceived to be eternal. Since the covenantal nation Israel is eternal (by Divine oath, Genesis 15) and since the Torah is eternal, Israel, the Torah and God are inextricably linked by virtue of their common eternity.

The land of Israel shares in this feature of eternity. The earth's perennial cycles of birth, growth, decay, death and rebirth, express a movement of regeneration and renaissance which informs the very nature of the most primitive form of life. There are intimations of immortality in the earth's movement from life to life: a fruit falls from the tree when it no longer requires the physical sustenance provided by attachment to the branch, and the tree re-births (regenerates) its fruit in the spring. The trees shed their leaves and fruits onto the earth, and when they decompose and merge with the earth, that very earth provides the necessary nutrients for the tree to continue to grow and bear fruit in the future. Plants leave their seeds in the ground, these continue to sprout plant life from the earth after the mother herb has been taken and eaten. And so the cycle of life, decay, death and rebirth is grounded in the eternal, infinite and natural

dimension of the earth. In the words of the wisest of men, "one generation passes away and another generation arrives, but the earth abides forever" (Ecclesiastes 1:3).

In a more national sense, it is the Biblical tradition to bury our dead in the earth, and specifically in the land of Israel. The Biblical idiom for death is, "And he was gathered to his nation, or his family," for if one is buried in one's homeland, one's physical remains merge with the physical remains of one's family members, of those who came and died before as well as of those who will follow in the future.

Furthermore, the land of Israel is invested with a special metaphysical quality which is inextricably linked to Knesset Yisrael, historic Israel. The first Hebrew, Abraham, entered into the Covenant between the Pieces – the Divine mission of a nation founded on the principles of humans created in the image of God and the right of freedom for every individual – in the City of Hebron, and God's promise of world peace and messianic redemption will be realized in the City of Jerusalem. The Cave of the Couples – Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, Jacob and Leah – was the very first acquisition by a Jew of land in Israel as the earthly resting place for the founders of our faith. At the very same time, it is also the womb of our future, a future informed by the ideas and ideals of our revered ancestors. "Grandchildren are the crowning glory of the aged; parents are the pride of their children". (Proverbs 17: 6)

It is for this reason that the Talmud maintains that only in Israel is there a true and authentic "community" (B.T. Horayot 3) – for only in Israel do we see the footprints of historic Israel, the sweep of the generations, the "common unity" of tradition, from Abraham to the Messiah; Israel formed, prophesied and taught its eternal traditions and continues to live out its destiny within the land of Israel.

Moreover, the eternal Torah is rooted and invested in the very earth, stones and vegetation of the land of Israel. This is true not only in terms of the Biblical covenantal promise which guarantees our constant relationship and eventual return to Israel; it is also true because of the myriad of mitzvot (commandments) embedded in its bedrock, its soil, and its agricultural produce. The seventh Sabbatical year provides free fruits and vegetables for anyone who wishes to take them; the "corners" of the field actually "belong" to the poor every day of the year, and they may come and reap their harvests; tithes from the land's produce immediately go to the Kohen – Priest-teachers, the Levite Cantors, and the poor who share in the land of the rest of the nation. The land of Israel itself cries out to its inhabitants in the name of God: "The land must not be sold permanently, because the land is mine and you reside in my land as foreigners and strangers". (Leviticus 25:23)

Hence God Himself, as it were, becomes inextricably linked – even “incorporated” or “incorporealized”, if you will – within the peoplehood, the land and the Torah of Israel, the very objects and subjects which express God’s will and out of which our essence and destiny is formed. Indeed, historic Israel, the land of Israel, the Torah of Israel and the Holy One Blessed be He, God of Israel and the universe are truly united in an eternal bond. ©2018 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The Torah reading of this week concludes the book of Vayikra. As is obvious to all who study this book, it is primarily concerned with laws and observances and the details connected to those Divine commandments. Even though the Torah had intimated previously that the observance of these commandments was not a matter of pure recommendation or suggestion but that they were mandatory conditions for the survival of the Jewish people, the punishment for disobedience was never graphically described as it is in the Torah reading of this week.

Here we have, in awful detail, the fate of the Jewish people in exile. Instead of serving the Creator in comfort and tranquility in their own homeland, Israel would now be forced to loyally serve God under the dire circumstances of exile and oppression. It is difficult to imagine what that first generation of Jews thought when they heard these words transmitted to them by Moshe.

It would be almost millennia later for these words to become reality. There is a tendency in human life, completely understandable and perhaps even justified, to postpone the realities and consequences of true prophecy to a later time, a time that one would never have to witness or experience.

Yet, somehow the stark predictions of the future that would befall Israel, because of its abandonment of Jewish life and tradition, undoubtedly made an impression on those who first heard these words. The question then remains whether this impression could or would be transmitted to later generations or would the only method for verifying them be that they would have to occur and become the reality.

After the Holocaust and the horrors experienced by the Jewish people in World War II and under the Soviet Union, the accepted and current mantra in Jewish life is “never again.” Though I fully subscribe to that sentiment, I think that many Jews have misinterpreted that slogan. They are under the impression that brave words are meant solely to apply to the cruel enemies of the Jewish people that still exist in our world.

This interpretation takes the words of the

statement “never again” and turns them into a challenge and an admonition exclusively directed to others who would wish us harm. However, as the Torah reading of this week clearly indicates, this warning and hope is not only directed at the outside world, but it is directed to our society and the makeup of the Jewish people itself.

We are the ones who should say “never again” – that we as a people will no longer continue to imitate the ever-changing follies and errors of the current age and society that we live in. Rather, we will restore ourselves by renewing our ancient traditions and observances, by loyalty to our Torah and to the Land of Israel and to the value system of Jewish life so explicitly explained to us in detail here in the book of Vayikra. Only then will we be able to say with confidence and certainty that these prophecies have run their course and that the time of redemption has dawned upon the people and the Land of Israel. ©2018 *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 AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

In one of today's portions, Behukotai, we read the tokheha-the curse, in which a series of punishments that will be meted out if the Jewish people do not follow the dictates of the Torah. This section actually follows a series of blessings if the Jews adhere to the Torah.

But it is strange because the length of the curses is longer than that of the blessings. Why are the blessings outnumbered by almost three to one? Several answers have been offered.

Ibn Ezra suggests that while the blessings are in fewer sentences, they are actually more numerous as they, unlike the curses, are written in general categories. In this sense, they are far more encompassing.

Biur (Naftali Hertz Weisel) takes a different approach. The blessings, he argues, are more dominant as they come upon us all at once in their full measure. This is not the case with the curses. The Torah insists that they will come about gradually as they are testimony to God's reluctance to punish His people. Indeed, a quick review of the text indicates that the reproofs are arranged in four couplets, increasing in severity. They begin with sickness and then continue on with famine, siege and exile. Each of these couplets begins with the words "if you will not harken unto Me [God]," indicating how each step follows a further rejection of God's Torah. (Leviticus 26:14, 18, 23, 27)

Another thought comes to mind. Perhaps, in fact, the curses are longer because the Torah speaks in

the language of people. If one does not feel well, he or she often delineates the specific hurt. The language used runs something like "my stomach hurts" or "my head aches" or "I have pain in my legs." In contrast, when one feels well, one never says "my stomach is in perfect order" or "my head is functioning well" or "my legs are moving just perfectly today." Rather, one very generally says "I'm feeling well." In other words, we do not emphasize the good that we receive the way we acknowledge the struggles that we face.

For this reason, the Torah, reflecting the thinking of human beings, speaks at length of the curses. As human beings accentuate their suffering, so too does the Torah in great specificity delineate the curses. The blessings are written in brief because people speak of the positive of life in abbreviated terms.

Perhaps this is the deepest message of the tokheha. It reminds us to be ever aware of the myriad of blessings that we often take for granted. It teaches that the greatest blessing is to know that you are blessed. ©2018 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 S. LEVIN

A Person's Value

In concluding the Sefer, we see that Sefer Vayikra consists of the laws involving the sacrifices (offerings) which were brought in the Temple, the responsibilities of the Kohanim in presenting those offerings, and the laws involved in the B'nei Yisrael's gifts to the Kohanim and Leviim for their service. In addition to these laws which revolved around the Temple, this Sefer is dedicated to the ethical laws between people, ethical laws between Man and Hashem, and special laws involving the B'nei Yisrael's relationship with the Land which Hashem had promised their forefathers. The ending of this Sefer explains the special gifts which were freely given to the Temple known as arachin, valuations.

The Torah states, "And Hashem spoke to Moshe saying. Speak to the Children of Yisrael and say to them, when a man will express a vow to Hashem regarding a valuation of souls. And it will be that the valuation of a male shall be, for someone who is twenty years of age up to sixty years of age, the valuation will be fifty silver shekels, of the Holy shekel. And if she be a female, the valuation shall be thirty shekels. And if from five years old up to twenty years, the valuation of a male will be twenty shekels and for a female, ten shekels. And if from one month up to five years, the valuation of a male is five silver shekels and for a female it will be three silver shekels. And if from sixty years of age and up, if for a male the valuation will be fifteen shekels and for a female it will be ten shekels. But if he is destitute for the valuation, then he shall be

brought before the Kohein and the Kohein should set up his evaluation, according to what the hand of the person who makes the vow can attain should the Kohein set his evaluation."

HaRav Shmshon Raphael Hirsch explains the concept of these gifts. They occur when "somebody feels the necessity or cherishes the wish to present an object or its value to the Sanctuary to express thereby his special interest in the Sanctuary, or his idea that the object in question has some special relation to the Sanctuary." According to Hirsch these gifts are "not such specially, pious, G-d pleasing acts, and least of all does it ascribe to them the slightest value as atonement for leading a sinful life." These gifts do not bring about true salvation, acts which demonstrate repentance. The Kli Yakar explains that the insertion of this section immediately after the extensive list of curses which Hashem promises the B'nei Yisrael should they not follow His Laws, indicate that they were brought after a period of suffering. The Kli Yakar explains that the suffering was caused by their abandonment of the proper path and their gifts were not a sign of repentance. After their suffering ended, they returned to their previous ways. The Ba'al HaTurim demonstrates that the total amount of money involved in a combination of each of these gifts is one hundred forty-three shekel, the exact same number as the number of curses mentioned in Sefer Vayikra (Numbers) and Sefer Devarim (Deuteronomy). He explains that the amount was given only after the suffering of the curses and not as a gift through which to become closer to Hashem.

HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin, the Aznayim L'Torah, explains the problem which arises with the evaluation of the person for whom the monetary redemption will take place. It is based on a similar monetary evaluation for a slave being sold in the marketplace. The problem which arises is that the marketplace evaluation for a slave is based on age, strength, and appearance, whereas in our case it is based on an evaluation of the nefesh, the soul. Here we face an insurmountable challenge as it is impossible for us to know the actual evaluation of an individual's soul. We must rely on an arbitrary amount which is fixed by Hashem. Rabbi Elie Munk attributed the evaluation to the holiness inherent in each individual. Since this is an impossible task for a human to judge, we are forced to evaluate based only on age and sex. Rabbi Dovid Tzvi Hoffman ties the fluctuation of the donated amount on the number of mitzvot which are required of each age or sex. Thus, a man who has more mitzvot than a woman (because of her responsibilities in the house and with the children) is given a higher evaluation. Other Rabbis (Rabbi Joseph Hertz, HaRav Hirsch) insist that the evaluation must be based on the marketplace for slaves. The law demonstrates that the changes which occur in the evaluation are based on the strength of the individual.

Thus, a woman would be evaluated as weaker than a man and the other changes reflect aging which changes one's strength.

HaRav Sorotzkin argues that the evaluations fluctuate based on one's potential religious responsibilities and do not reflect the slave market. A young boy from the age of one month until five years is evaluated in the same way that we evaluate the firstborn for the pidyon haben, the redemption of this child through a gift of five silver shekels to the Kohein. From the age of five years until twenty years, the young male begins the study of Torah in which the potential within his soul is awakened. The value of his spirituality rises due to his increased knowledge of Hashem and the mitzvot which are expected of him. From the age of twenty until the age of sixty he is now required to fulfill all of the mitzvot and is responsible for his own sins. At the age of sixty, a man's strength weakens and he can no longer serve Hashem with the same vigor of his youth.

Now we can understand the different evaluations based on the potential for growth spiritually. As the challenge becomes greater, so does the reward and value increase. Finally, at the age of sixty when the challenge of the potential for growth diminishes slowly, so does the value assigned to the soul diminish accordingly. I would also posit that this answers the question which occurs at each age concerning the lower value assigned to women. Women, by their very nature, are the source of feelings of concern for others. This already places them closer to Hashem and His Mitzvot. Since the evaluation is measured by the struggle for one to achieve one's potential, it is clear that women are evaluated at a lower amount only because the challenge for them is lower than for man. Man struggles more and is rewarded with a higher evaluation. Women start with an advantage and the struggle is less to accomplish their potential.

This is not to say that women have a natural propensity for spirituality and therefore face no struggle. Women face temptation the same as men do. Remember, the evaluation is based on the challenge to achieve one's potential. Even though it may be easier for some and more difficult for others, the challenge still exists for everyone throughout our lives. We must each rise to the challenge before us and may we succeed in overcoming that challenge and reach our spiritual potential. ©2018 Rabbi D.S. Levin

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

Parshat Behar includes the rare occasion of the Torah asking a question for us. When describing the laws of Shmita (leaving the land unattended every seventh year), the Torah says "and if you should say 'What will we eat in start producing again. Why is the Torah asking the question for us, rather than just

letting us know that food will be supplied?"

Rabbi Lazer Gurkow answers that if you read the Passuk carefully, it says "if you should SAY", demonstrating that the question is less of a quarrel and more of a statement of submission. When asked with humility, G-d rewards our trust with plenty. The Torah is not only informing us of the Shmita plans, but also showing us that our attitude and disposition when asking tough questions is as important as the questions themselves. ©2018 Rabbi S. Ressler and LeLamed, Inc.

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Yom Yerushalayim

*Translated for the Encyclopedia Talmudit
by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss*

Through all the land of Israel was divided amongst the *Shavetim*, 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 *Yerushalayim* 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 *Yerushalayim* 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

Toil Trouble

The portion of Bechukosai begins quite simply. Hashem tells us: "If you will walk in My ordinances 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 of the field will give its fruit" (Leviticus 26:3-4) Rashi the premier commentary on the Torah, has a mission to define the simple explanation of the verse. He rarely deviates from the simple pshat (explanation), unless he prefaces his remarks by stating his intention to do so. In this instance Rashi explains the concept of "walking in My ordinances" not as mitzvah observance or following in the Ways of the Almighty. Rather, Rashi explains walking in G-d's ways as toiling in Torah study. Rashi explains his commentary: One might think that this [verse] denotes the fulfillment of the commandments; but when Scripture follows by stating and you shall keep My commandments and do them, it is plain that in this passage there is mentioned the fulfillment of the commands. How then must I explain 'Im Bechukosai Teleichu?'" As an admonition that you should study the Torah laboriously.

Clearly when Rashi translates the words, he seems to deviate from the simple meaning. Instead of explaining, "If you go in my path, he states, If you will toil in Torah." Walking in Hashem's path may mean many things. Surely many of them can be simply understood from those words. But toiling in Torah does not seem to be one of them.

In a very popular day school, the Morah was reviewing the meaning of the prayers with her young charges. "Children," she asked in her melodious voice, "Who knows what Shema Yisrael means?"

The hands shot up and waved frantically. "I know! I know!" came muffled shouts from the youngsters who each had their siddurim opened to the proper pages. "It means 'Hear O Israel!'"

"Wonderful!" responded the young teacher. "And who knows what Baruch Atah Hashem means?"

Again the students raised their hands in excitement. "It means 'blessed are You Hashem!'"

"Good," she exclaimed. "Good. Now for a hard one. Who knows the meaning of Amen?"

There was a moment of silence and then little Joey raised his hand! "That's simple every time it says Amen in the Siddur the translation appears right next to it!"

"It is," asked the Morah.

"Sure," said Joey. "Everyone knows that Amen means Cong." (In many siddurim, you will see the following at the end of a blessing: "Cong. -- (Heb) Amen.")

I learned the Rashi and learned a lesson. Sometimes we read words and we translate from

Hebrew to English. We nod our heads as if it makes sense, and we don't give pause to think about the true meaning of what we have just said. Often, however, even in the simplest form the mere translation of words does not constitute the actual meaning of a verse. Indeed the Hebrew Im Bchukosai Talaichu translates word by word as "If you will walk in My ordinances" but when learning Torah we must do more than merely look at the words and then translate. We must delve deeper. We must analyze seemingly redundant phrases. We must get to the depth of the true meaning of the words. Indeed, we must toil in Torah! ©2018 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & torah.org

RABBI PINCHAS WINSTON

Perceptions

"And I will grant peace in the land, and you will lie down with no one to frighten [you]." (Vayikra 26:6) It is not uncommon to see a security car roaming our small community early in the morning or late at night. It used to be a small car, but they moved up to a four-by-four, making the car look even more foreboding and therefore a greater source of security for the inhabitants.

People sleep better at night knowing that someone is minding the security of the place. This is a religious community, so in their heart-of-hearts, people know that only God provides security in life. But, not everyone is in touch with the heart-of-hearts from moment-to-moment, and they feel better seeing "agents" of God driving around in four-by-fours.

We also know, in our heart-of-hearts, that the guy in the security car does not carry a gun, and could easily be on the other side of town when bandits or troublemakers do their thing. If we're "lucky," he'll see them in time to call the "real" authorities, who will take so long to arrive at the scene, that the perpetrators more-than-likely, will get away without a problem.

Does this mean having a security system is a waste of time and money? Not at all. It just means that we have to recall at all times that ANY security system, no matter how complete or sophisticated, only works because God makes it work. If He wants, He can make it fail too, and has when history has required it. Remember Pearl Harbor?

Why is it important to recall this? It's obvious, but the Torah speaks it out anyhow: GOD'S security cooperation depends upon OUR Torah cooperation. The more we are real with Torah, the more real He is with our security. The more real we are with His "role" in our safety, the more "real" He is with our safety. One of God's Names is "Shalom" for a reason (Shabbos 10b), and as Rashi says on this verse, when you have Shalom, you have EVERYTHING:

And I will grant peace in the land, and you will lie down with no one to frighten [you]. (Vayikra 26:6)

And I will grant peace: You might say, "There is

food, and there is drink, but if there is no peace, there is nothing!" The Torah therefore states after all this [blessing], "I will grant peace in the land." From here [we learn] that peace is equal to everything else, as indicated when we say: "Who... makes peace and creates everything" (Yeshayahu 45:7). (Rashi, Vayikra 26:6)

It may be just a coincidence (though we do not believe in coincidence, at least not the random ones), but the information about God's Name being "Shalom" happens to be on the same page in the Talmud about the gift of Shabbos, and the sale of Yosef. Though they seem unrelated by the way they are presented, they are in fact about the exact same idea: Shalom.

Shabbos is easy. Shabbos is all about Shalom. We even greet one another on Shabbos by saying "Shabbat Shalom." Shabbos IS peace and it comes to provide peace. All the activities of Shabbos are geared to providing peace from the hustle-and-bustle, and inner turmoil a person has to deal with on a day-to-day basis.

What about the sale of Yosef? If anything, it resulted in just the opposite of Shalom. On the contrary, the Midrash says that Yosef was terrified by the entire experience, and it caused Ya'akov Avinu to mourn for 22 years. Where was the Shalom in that terrible episode of Jewish history?

We can start answering that question by asking another: What was Ya'akov Avinu thinking when he sent Yosef to check on the welfare of his brothers? He knew how they felt about Yosef, and at the very least, Yosef would have had a very difficult time with them, especially so far from home. Why did he send Yosef on such a risky mission, especially given that he knew through prophecy what Yosef meant to the future of the Jewish people? Was he so naive?

The Torah answers this question in advance, if a person pays close attention to the wording of the verse and doesn't take it for granted. This is how Ya'akov phrased his request to Yosef:

He said to him, "Please go and check on the SHALOM -- welfare -- of your brother..." (Bereishis 37:14)

The word translates as "welfare," but it means "completion." On a simple level, Yosef was sent to see how his brothers were faring, literally a suicide mission which, as a loyal son, he did not even question. On a deeper level Yosef was sent to see where his brothers were spiritually holding, if they had made peace with themselves and their role within the structure of the future Jewish people.

This was something, Ya'akov Avinu knew, that could only be revealed while his sons were on their own, and through Yosef. It was a sacrifice, not any less than Avraham taking Yitzchak up as the Akeidah? Ya'akov needed to know if he had succeeded at his life's mission, which was to build the foundation of the

tribes of the Jewish people. How those tribes treated one another would reveal what he wanted to know.

Yet his worst nightmare came true. The brothers had mysteriously done away with Yosef, and had undone all that Ya'akov Avinu worked so hard to accomplish. Building a nation from 11 tribes may have been fine to them, but anything less than 12 was a disastrous failure for their father. Perhaps this is why he could not be consoled the entire time that Yosef was missing. Ya'akov's life had lost its meaning.

Fortunately God had "his back." He used the brothers' lack of inner completion as a means to work on Yosef's. They schemed to sell him into slavery, but God had schemed to put Yosef on track to fulfill his dreams of national leadership. Over the course of 22 years, Yosef became "shalaim," complete. When his brothers eventually saw this, they too were forced to work on their own.

This is the peace that God promises the Jewish people for keeping His Torah in this week's parsha, Parashas Bechukosai. It is the same peace that God already promised for obeying the laws of Shmittah and Yovel in the previous parsha, Parashas Behar. Refraining from working the land every seventh year, and then returning it to its original owners every fiftieth year, meant that a Jew was real with the fact that the land and its produce belongs to God. It shows a person's trust and faith in God for their survival, and that warrants Divine protection.

In fact, the Shmittah year is its OWN reward. It allows people who normally do not have enough time to learn Torah and work on their personal completion the previous six years, to do so on the sabbatical. They have a chance to work on their "inner" shalom which guarantees to help with the "outer" shalom.

So, rather than rely on a four-by-four, and the people inside it to keep the peace, work on your inner shalom through Torah and mitzvos. It is THIS that helps those responsible for keeping the peace do exactly that. Inner spiritual completion is really equal to everything else, because it is what makes everything else so peaceful. ©2018 Rabbi P. Winston and torah.org

