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From: cshulman@gmail.com

## INTERNET PARSHA SHEET ON BEHAR BECHUKOSAI - 5773

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Orthodox Union / [www.ou.org](http://www.ou.org)  
**Britain's Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks**  
**The Limits of the Free Market**  
5772

As I was writing this essay a newspaper headline caught my eye. It read, "The UK's richest people have defied the double-dip recession to become even richer over the past year." Despite the fact that most people have become poorer, or at least seen their real income stay static, since the financial crisis of 2008. As the saying goes, "There's nothing surer: the rich get rich and the poor get poorer." It is to this phenomenon that the social legislation of Behar is addressed.

Leviticus 25 sets out a number of laws whose aim is to correct the tendency toward radical and ever-increasing inequality that result from the unfettered play of free market economics. So we have the sabbatical year in which debts were released, Hebrew slaves set free, the land lay fallow and its produce, not to be harvested, belonged to everyone. There was the Jubilee year in which, with some exceptions, ancestral land returned to its original owners. There was the command to help the needy: "If any of your fellow Israelites become poor and are unable to support themselves among you, help them as you would a foreigner and stranger, so they can continue to live among you." (25: 35). And there was the obligation to treat slaves not slavishly but as "hired workers or temporary residents" (25: 40).

As Heinrich Heine pointed out, "Moses did not want to abolish ownership of property; he wished, on the contrary, that everyone should possess something, so that no man might, because of poverty, be a slave with a slavish mind. Liberty was forever the ultimate thought of this great emancipator, and it still breathes and flames in all his laws which concern pauperism." (Israel Tabak, *Judaic Lore in Heine*, Johns Hopkins University Press reprints, 1979, 32.)

Despite the sheer antiquity of these laws, time and again they have inspired those wrestling with issues of liberty, equity and justice. The

verse about the Jubilee Year, "Proclaim Liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof" (25: 10) is inscribed on the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia. The international movement that began in the late 1990s and involved more than 40 nations, campaigning for cancellation of Third World debt was called Jubilee 2000 and was directly inspired by our parsha.

The approach of the Torah to economic policy is unusual. Clearly we can make no direct inference from laws given more than three thousand years ago, in an agricultural age and to a society consciously under the sovereignty of God, to the circumstances of the twenty-first century with its global economy and international corporations. Between ancient texts and contemporary application comes the whole careful process of tradition and interpretation (Torah shebe'al peh).

Nonetheless, there do seem to be some important parameters. Work – making a living, earning your daily bread – has dignity. A Psalm (128: 2) states: "When you eat of the labour of your hands, you are happy and it shall be well with you." We say this every Saturday night at the start of the working week. Unlike aristocratic cultures such as that of ancient Greece, Judaism was never dismissive of work or the productive economy. It did not favour the creation of a leisured class. "Torah study without an occupation will in the end fail and lead to sin" (Avot 2: 2). Next, unless there are compelling reasons otherwise, one has a right to the fruits of one's labours. Judaism distrusts large government as an infringement of liberty. That is the core of the prophet Samuel's warning about monarchy: A king, he says, "will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive groves and give them to his attendants ... He will take a tenth of your flocks, and you yourselves will become his slaves" (1 Sam. 8).

Judaism is the religion of a people born in slavery and longing for redemption; and the great assault of slavery against human dignity is that it deprives me of the ownership of the wealth I create. At the heart of the Hebrew Bible is the God who seeks the free worship of free human beings, and one of the most powerful defences of freedom is private property as the basis of economic independence. The ideal society envisaged by the prophets is one in which each person is able to sit "underneath his own vine and fig tree" (Micah 4: 4).

The free economy uses the fuel of competition to sustain the fire of invention. Long before Adam Smith, Judaism had accepted the proposition that the greatest advances are often brought about through quite unspiritual drives. "I saw," says the author of Ecclesiastes, "that all labour and all achievement spring from man's envy of his neighbour". Or as the talmudic sages put it, "Were it not for the evil inclination, no one would build a house, marry a wife, have children, or engage in business." The rabbis even favoured the free market in their own sphere of Jewish education. An established teacher, they said, could not object to a rival setting up in competition. The reason they gave was, simply: "Jealousy among scholars increases wisdom."

The market economy is the best system we know for alleviating poverty through economic growth. In a single generation in recent years it has lifted 100 million Indians and 400 million Chinese from poverty, and the sages saw poverty as an assault on human dignity. Poverty is not a blessed or divinely ordained condition. It is, the rabbis said, 'a kind of death' and 'worse than fifty plagues'. They said, 'Nothing is harder to bear than poverty, because he who is crushed by poverty is like one to whom all the troubles of the world cling and upon whom all the curses of Deuteronomy have descended. If all other troubles were placed one side and poverty on the other, poverty would outweigh them all.'

However, the market economy is better at producing wealth than at distributing it equitably. The concentration of wealth in a few hands gives disproportion power to some at the cost of others. Today in Britain it is not unusual for top CEOs to earn at least 400 times as much as their employees. This has not produced economic growth or financial stability but the opposite. As I write these words, one of Margaret Thatcher's

advisors, Ferdinand Mount, has just published a critique of the financial deregulation she introduced: The New Few. Equally impressive is the recent book by the South Korean economist Ha-Joon Chang, 23 Things they don't tell you about Capitalism. This is not a critique of market economics, which he believes is still the best system there is. But, in his words, "it needs careful regulation and steering."

That is what the legislation contained in Behar represents. It tells us that an economic system must exist within a moral framework. It need not aim at economic equality but it must respect human dignity. No one should become permanently imprisoned in the chains of debt. No one should be deprived of a stake in the commonwealth, which in biblical times meant a share in the land. No one should be a slave to his or her employer. Everyone has the right – one day in seven, one year in seven – to respite from the endless pressures of work. None of this means dismantling the market economy, but it may involve periodic redistribution.

At the heart of these laws is a profoundly humane vision of society. "No man is an island." We are responsible for one another and implicated in one another's fate. Those who are blessed by God with more than they need should share some of that surfeit with those who have less than they need. This, in Judaism, is not a matter of charity but of justice – that is what the word tzedakah means. We need some of this spirit in advanced economies today if we are not to see human misery and social unrest. No one said it better than Isaiah in the first chapter of the book that bears his name:

Seek justice, encourage the oppressed,  
Defend the cause of the fatherless,  
Plead the case of the widow ...

Mankind was not created to serve markets. Markets were made to serve the image of God that is mankind.

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From Rabbi Yissocher Frand ryfrand@torah.org & genesis@torah.org  
To ravfrand@torah.org

**Subject Rabbi Frand on Parsha**

**Rabbi Yissocher Frand** - Parshas Behar - Bechukosai  
5772

### **Make Peace and Greet Moshiach**

Parshas Bechukosai contains words of blessing and words of rebuke. The Parsha begins with the message that the world is set up, such that, if the Jewish people keep G-d's mitzvos, blessings will come automatically. Rains will fall at the most convenient of times, and the Jewish people will be able to rest securely in their land.

The Toras Kohanim asks on this pasuk [verse], "Does this mean we will only dwell securely in Eretz Yisroel, but not in Chutz L'Aretz [outside the Land of Israel]? What does this mean -- we do have food and drink?" The Toras Kohanim answers that if there is no peace, there is nothing. As long as we are living in exile under a foreign government, there is no Shalom. Without Shalom, there is nothing. Shalom is equivalent to everything, as we say in our prayers, "He Makes Shalom and Creates Everything".

As we all know, without Shalom -- Shalom in a community or Shalom in a family -- Shalom between communities and between nations, nothing has any worth. This is not just a Toras Kohanim, this is a Mishna - - the last Mishna in Shas [Uktzin 3:12]. "The Holy One, Blessed be He, found no vessel to hold Blessing for Israel other than (the vessel of) Peace." The Kesav Sofer explains that when there is no peace, it is usually because people are jealous of their neighbors. When people are constantly comparing themselves to the Joneses or the Goldbergs or the Cohens, then they will never be happy. People will never be satisfied, no matter how many blessings, no matter how much food and drink they have. If one is being eaten up by that "cancer" which is called kin'ah [jealousy], then he will never ever have an appreciation for what he

possess. Therefore, there is no vessel which can hold the blessings -- other than the vessel of peace.

Today, we have a lack of Shalom in Klal Yisroel, even, unfortunately, among our own people. And if we are lacking Shalom, we cannot appreciate our blessings.

In 1980, Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky traveled to the Knessiah Gedolah (of Agudath Israel) in Jerusalem. At that particular time in his life, Rav Yaakov felt extremely weak. Rav Yaakov did not feel that he was physically up to making the trip to Eretz Yisroel. But, Rav Yaakov's arm was twisted, he was prevailed upon, and he made the trip. [He was so concerned about his health, that he felt he would not make it back home. He even left word that if he were to die in Eretz Yisroel, he wanted to be buried there, of course.]

Because of his physical condition, Rav Yaakov did not travel around much, nor did he give shiurim, while in Eretz Yisroel. However, Rav Yaakov said, "I want to go to one Yeshiva -- I want to go to Yeshivas Kol Yaakov." Rav Yaakov was taken to this Yeshiva and he got up to speak. Rav Yaakov was crying as he told the students, "My entire life I wanted to greet Moshiach. I now feel that I won't have this merit; I don't feel that I'll live much longer. But, if I can't greet Moshiach, at least I want to be among a group of people that I know for sure, will be among those who greet Moshiach. I know that this Yeshiva will be among those that will greet him."

What was so special about this Yeshiva? Did they know Shas by heart? Are all the Bochrin in Kol Yaakov careful to be on time when davening [daily prayer] starts? Not necessarily. This Yeshiva was so special because they make peace between Ashkenazic and Sephardic bochrin. It was one Yeshiva that had both students of European-Russian descent and of Spanish-Turkish-North African descent. They made Shalom between these two (sometimes at odds) segments of the Jewish people. We must take this advice from Rav Yaakov. If we want a Segulah [a treasure (used in the context of having special merit)] that we will be from those who greet Moshiach, we must take action to make Shalom -- between husband and wife; between man and his fellow; between Chassidim and Misnagdim. Make Shalom, and, Rav Yaakov says, be among those who greet Moshiach.

Good News in the Middle of the Tochacha

There is a very long and interesting Ramba"n in this week's Parsha. The Ramba"n tries to show that all the terrible things in the Tochacha, that the Torah predicts will happen, if we do not keep the mitzvos, did indeed happen.

For instance, the Ramba"n says that the pasuk "G-d will return you to Egypt in boats" refers to the days of Titus when the Jews were loaded onto boats and shipped as slaves to Egypt. The Ramba"n brings many different examples ... "The King which you will appoint over yourself..." refers to Agrippa. The pasuk hints at the fact that he was not worthy of being a King.

Finally, the Ramba"n says that the pasuk [26:32] "I will make desolate the Land, and your enemies who dwell upon it will be desolate" (V'shamemu aleha oyeveichem hayoshvim bah) is not a Curse, rather it is a Blessing. It is "Good News" in the middle of the Tochacha. The pasuk tells us that our Holy Land will not accept our enemies upon it. This, says the Ramba"n, is a great proof (of the Divine Hand) and Promise for us. "For there cannot be found throughout the world a land that had been so good and fertile (which now became so desolate and inhospitable)".

The Ramba"n is saying that if you want to be a Believer, you merely need to look at Eretz Yisroel. Look what happened there for 2000 years when it was occupied by Arabs and by Romans and by Turks and by the British. Previously, it had been most beautiful but under foreign dominion it became the most desolate. The Torah assured us that from the day we left Eretz Yisroel, it would not accept any other nation or populace. They all tried to settle it, but none were successful.

This is what the Torah means when it says "Your enemies will be desolate upon it". No nation will ever be successful in inhabiting Eretz Yisroel, except Klal Yisroel.

What would happen, if the Indians came to the Federal Government and said "You know, 200 years ago we made a silly mistake. We sold you Manhattan Island at a rock bottom price -- \$24. We realize you're entitled to a profit, we'll give you \$48 for Manhattan. We'll give you 48 million dollars? We'll give you 48 billion dollars?" Guess what? No sale. What has happened to Manhattan Island in those 200 years? For what it is worth now, there is no way the Government would ever consider giving it back.

Imagine if the Goyim would have been successful in making Eretz Yisroel profitable. Imagine if in 1948, it was a beautiful and productive land. Would they have consented to returning it to the Jewish People? But, as the Ramba"n says, they were not successful. In 1948, when we came to ask, "Can we have the land back?" "You mean that strip of land, that's hard like iron, in which nothing grows? That worthless strip of land in the middle of the dessert? Good Luck with it!" This is Divine Providence, as promised by the Torah in this week's parsha.

I have always wondered - one looks in the Middle East -- Saudi Arabia has oil, Qatar, Iraq, Yemen, every country has oil. Egypt even has oil. How is it, that from our Holy Land, the choicest of all lands we cannot squeeze a drop of oil (at least prior to recent discoveries)? This is "The Eyes of the L-rd are upon it from the start of the year to its end"? But what would have been in 1948, if the British were sitting on a Saudi Arabia? What would have been if they were sitting on a Kuwait? Obviously, they would not have been so eager to give up black gold. This is part of "Your enemies will be desolate upon it".

The upshot of all of this is that if we seek a lesson in Emunah, if one does not believe in G-d for all the other miracles and wonders that He has done... Just look at this Ramba"n. Just look at this Pasuk. Just look at that Land. If one's eyes are open and one is not blind, one will see the Hand of G-d and the Hashgocha Prottes [Personal Divine Providence] upon us and upon all the Jewish people.

Transcribed by David Twersky Seattle, WA; Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman, Baltimore, MD

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**Thanks to hamelaket@gmail.com for collecting the following items:**

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**from: Destiny Foundation/Rabbi Berel Wein**  
**<info@jewishdestiny.com>**  
**reply-to: info@jewishdestiny.com**  
**subject: Weekly Parsha from Rabbi Berel Wein**

**In My Opinion :: Rabbi Berel Wein**  
***Seeing Generations***

My two month old great grandson came to visit me on Saturday night last. He naturally brought his parents along for the visit but he was the honored guest, the center of all generational attention. He will not remember the visit, for memory kicks in later than does birth and unfortunately in many instances kicks out early before death. Nevertheless for great grandparents a visit from a member of the fourth generation of one's family is an occasion of note and moment. Having grown up at a time when very few of my peers ever saw or knew a grandparent, it is truly miraculous to me that I have seen and know many of my great grandchildren. Life spans have lengthened considerably over the past decades of progress in medicine and health care. And, the results are reflected in the ability to see and know

generations in one's family in a manner undreamt of in the generation of my parents.

Because of this increased longevity and its allowance of seeing generations in one's family, one's view of life now spans many decades and even centuries. This is certainly valuable and important in terms of the Jewish people, for the validation of Judaism has always been dependent on family tradition and continuity.

Knowing one's family, its history and traditions, its accomplishments and failures, warts and all, make up the stuff of Jewish life and the secret of Jewish survival. The dissolution and diminishing of family and generational ties accompanied by late marriage or no marriage at all, a very low birthrate and the rootlessness and mobility of the young have all played a role in the slowly disappearing non-Orthodox Jewish society in the Diaspora - and to a lesser extent here in Israel.

The likelihood of seeing Jewish generations without the original backing of a traditional Jewish education and lifestyle is becoming increasingly difficult.

The older generations are, and deservedly so, the memory bank for the coming generations. Though the older generation may recall events and individuals through the haze of nostalgia and personal subjective view, nevertheless it does serve as a vital and irreplaceable reservoir of direction, knowledge and inspiration for the young just beginning their life's adventures.

The Torah emphasizes the connection between generations in terms of Jewish tradition, and perhaps even more importantly, in terms of Jewish destiny. "Know from whence you came" has a broader meaning in Jewish life than the specific one outlined in Avot. It is so to speak the call to arms of Judaism.

The merit of previous generations is the bank account upon which later generations can draw sustenance and strength. But that presupposes that one knows the name of the bank and the account number where that treasure is being held. And that can only be known through the personal bond between generations in a family.

Self-identity and self-worth, the necessary ingredients for a healthy Torah personality, can only be achieved by the input of generations with knowledge of the past and the dream of the future. Thus the old generation and the new budding generation are interlocked in an eternal symbiotic relationship.

A few of my American great grandchildren used the afikoman money they received from me towards the purchase of their first bi-tri-cycles. I am assured by their parents that when they ascend those vehicles they remember my role and me in their new found mobility. As they grow older and wiser perhaps they will also read my books and listen to my recorded lectures. One can always hope, can't one?

In any event, life should not be the only connection between generations. Even though I was barely ten years old when my grandfather passed away, he has remained a constant inspiration and role model for me throughout my life. The ability to span generations is a necessary Jewish trait of survival. And it is more than the power of memory that is involved in this feat. It is also a desire to know of the past and of one's own heritage and lineage.

The Torah emphasizes lineage in many areas of discussion and halacha. The past cannot shape or guarantee the future but it certainly influences its development and the unfolding of events. Therefore the influence of generations - the positive influence of love and attention - creates the Jewish future and is the greatest gift that the older generation can bestow upon its young emerging generation. Actually seeing one's generations and interacting with them is one of life's grandest triumphs. Shabat shalom

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**from: Destiny Foundation/Rabbi Berel Wein**  
**<info@jewishdestiny.com>**

reply-to: info@jewishdestiny.com  
subject: Weekly Parsha from Rabbi Berel Wein

Weekly Parsha :: Rabbi Berel Wein  
Behar – Bechukotai

The book of Vayikra concludes with a description of Jewish destiny and a foretelling of dire events that that will befall the Jewish people. The clear message in this parsha, and as repeated later in the book of Dvarim and in the words of the prophets of Israel over the next millennium, is that the Jewish people and its behavior and society are held to a high standard of loyalty and piety.

The consequences of backsliding from these Torah standards are major and painful. God's relationship with the Jewish people is serious business and the unbreakable covenant between the Jewish people and the Creator is eternally present and binding.

Ramban and others ascribe the events portrayed in Vayikra to the times and destruction of the First Temple. The descriptions in Dvarim – which are longer and more intense – refer to the times and destruction of the Second Temple and its millennia long aftermath in the exile of the Jewish people.

Also present and implicit in the difficult message communicated in this parsha, and in Dvarim as well, is the ultimate promise of God to preserve us and not completely forsake us. All of Jewish history, even until our very day, has lived up to these forecasts and events as recorded for us in the parsha.

The Ramban counts as one of the proofs of Torah's divinity the fact that words written and taught so many centuries earlier than the actual event would eventually take place are accurate, detailed and cogent.

The book of Vayikra is replete with laws, ritual commandments, sacrificial service, purity and impurity and the technical details of being a Jew. It has very little narrative to it and it is the most scholarly difficult of all of the books of the Torah. If the Torah's objective was to induce people to a so-called user friendly faith, then this is not the book that should have been presented.

But the Torah is integrity itself. Therefore, in Jewish tradition the law demands that those who apply for conversion to Judaism should initially be discouraged and not enticed into thinking that somehow becoming Jewish guarantees paradise in this world or even the next. The rewards of Judaism are great but there are costs, responsibilities and sacrifices that accompany those rewards.

And, an awareness of those costs is necessary for true Jewish commitment. Jewish history is not to be seen as a random occurrence of events. It is rather part of the actual results of the covenant entered into between Israel and the Creator at Sinai. Everything that was foretold in such detail and exactness in the Torah, as to what would befall Israel in its long journey through history and civilization, has in effect occurred and happened.

It is at once sobering to see how this has unfolded in Jewish life. But it is also encouraging, for it guarantees the fulfillment of the blessings of the Torah upon Israel as formulated in this week's parsha. The covenant in all of its parts reigns forever.

Shabat shalom

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from: Ohr Somayach <ohr@ohr.edu>  
to: weekly@ohr.edu  
subject: Torah Weekly  
Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parshat Behar – Bechukotai  
For the week ending 4 May 2013 / 23 Iyyar 5773  
by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com  
Insights

### *Hidden Miracles*

*"If you walk in My laws..." (26:3)*

The purpose of this world is to be a factory to produce a product called Olam Haba — the World-to-Come.

That is our only target, and the mitzvot our only passport.

However, you can read the Torah from cover to cover and you won't find one specific promise about the reward for keeping the mitzvot in the next world. Promises of reward in this world abound. We are promised the rains in their time. The land will give its produce and the trees will bear fruit. There will be an abundance of food that we will eat to satiety. We will dwell securely in our land. No one will walk down a dark street and be frightened. No one will worry about sending his children off on the bus in the morning. There will be abundance and peace.

Why is it that the Torah makes no open promises about the reward for keeping the mitzvot in the next world, but is replete with details of their reward in this existence?

All reward and punishment in this world is through hidden miracles.

When a person eats bacon or a cheeseburger and dies prematurely, nobody knows that he died because he ate bacon or a cheeseburger.

People die at his age even when they don't eat bacon or cheeseburgers. They die younger.

A person gives tzedaka and becomes rich. You don't see that he became rich because he gave tzedaka. There are plenty of rich people who don't give tzedaka — they inherited it or they won the sweepstake. The hidden miracle is that this person wasn't destined to become rich or wasn't supposed to die young, but because he gave tzedaka or because he ate the bacon or cheeseburger, G-d changed this person's destiny. It's miraculous, but it's hidden. It looks like nature, but if it were actually the work of nature, then nothing that a person did in this world could have any effect on him. For a person is born under a certain mazal, a certain "destiny", and without the intervention of an outside force — the hidden miracle — nothing that a person did, whether for good or bad, would have any repercussions in this world.

That's why the Torah speaks at great length about the outcome of the performance or non-performance of the mitzvot in this world. For it is truly miraculous that our actions should affect anything in this world, a world that, aside from these hidden miracles, is run by a system of mazal and nature.

However, as far as the next world is concerned, it's obvious that our actions will have repercussions there. The Torah doesn't need to stress the reward and punishment in that existence because it's obvious that people who engage in spiritual pursuits and serve G-d faithfully should receive spiritual rewards. But it is certainly not natural that people who are immersed in the work of the spirit, the study of Torah and the performance of mitzvot should receive their reward in this world as well. Thus the Torah stresses the reward for keeping the mitzvot in this world because that is something that no one could surmise without being told of its existence.

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from: Shema Yisrael Torah Network  
<shemalist@shemayisrael.com>  
to: Peninim <peninim@shemayisrael.com>  
subject: Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum

Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum  
Parshas Behar / Bechukotai

### *Parshas Behar*

*If you sell anything to your neighbor, or buy anything from your neighbor, you should not defraud one another. (25:14)*

The Talmud Bava Basra 87b details a number of fraudulent practices which were employed by less-than-honest businessmen who would cheat their customers. Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai hesitated publicizing these practices, explaining that he was confronted with a moral dilemma. If he would lecture, it was quite possible that some of the listeners who were themselves dishonest might learn new methods for defrauding others. On the other hand, if he did not lecture, the cheaters would posit that the scholars were naïve to the ways of the world and unaware of the various ploys for cheating others. One wonders why it was Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai's responsibility to inform the wise cheaters that the sages were just as aware of their methods of depravity as they were. Who really cares what dishonest people think of us?

In his commentary to the Talmud, the Maharsha explains that it was important for Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai to relay the message to the cheaters: Yes, we are aware of all of the shtick, the deceit, the lies that can be employed to defraud the unsuspecting, but we would never do it, due to our ethical character. This approach might target some of the cheaters who, as a result of this information, might consider repenting their ways and putting an end to their sordid behavior. No longer could they rationalize their unethical behavior, saying, "We are only doing what everybody else is doing. We are no different than the rest." When the dishonest dealers realize that, indeed, many people are aware of the numerous ways to take advantage of unknowing and trusting souls - yet, because they value and appreciate the gift of honesty, they will not resort to stealing from others - it will change their attitudes. Many swindlers will change their ways and look for honest work and honest ways in which to earn a living.

This, explains Horav A. Henach Leibowitz, zl, is the power of a Kiddush Hashem, sanctification of Hashem's Name. The force of absolute truth emanating from such an experience can even impact the most deceitful sinner into altering his fraudulent lifestyle. Merely becoming aware of the honest behavior of righteous people can do a world of good and quite possibly change a life.

As always, there is another side to consider. Negative publicity can destroy one's perspective on Judaism. Someone who is riding the fence, not sure if the Orthodox way of life is his cup of tea, will certainly swing to the left when he hears of an impropriety committed by a member of the Orthodox community. This is especially true if the infraction represents a breach of the individual's own personal moral code.

The Rosh Yeshiva extends this idea further, presenting the notion that there is no such thing as an insignificant theft, a white lie, a tiny lie. Hashem's seal is emes, truth. Truth is an absolute. There is no grey area. A statement that deviates one iota from the truth is completely false. A penny taken through deceitful method is an act of theft - regardless of its minute value.

Rav Henach relates a famous story concerning Horav Aharon Kotler, zl, founder and Rosh Yeshiva of Beth Medrash Govohah. He was presented with an artist's rendering of the proposed new structure for the yeshiva building. This drawing was to serve as the backdrop for fundraising purposes and publicity about the yeshiva. The artist had visualized how the edifice, once completed, would appear. It truly was an impressive picture. Rav Aharon studied the picture and found a flaw. He pointed out that there was one extra tree in a place where it did not - nor could ever - exist. Defending the drawing were those who commissioned the artwork. They noted that everything else was true to its image. The yeshiva building was accurate; the surroundings were on target. One tree was out of place - Nu! It had no bearing on the building itself, and, after all, the artist had worked so hard to prepare a flawless graphic. The Rosh Yeshiva was adamant. "It is not the emes!" The drawing was laid to rest. Torah can only be established on a foundation of pure emes. Honesty and integrity may never be compromised - regardless of one's lofty goals.

***The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is Mine; For you are sojourners and residents with Me. (25:23)***

One who delves into the mitzvos of Shemittah and Yoveil will infer that their motif is to teach man that he lacks ownership of the land - and, for that matter, of anything. Man is temporary; life is as fleeting as the moment. We are here by the grace of G-d, and we had better live our lives like that. The Torah wants us to acknowledge that L'Hashem ha'aretz u'meloah, teival v'yoshvei vah, "To Hashem (belongs) the earth and its fullness, the inhabited land and those who dwell in it" (Tehillim 24:1). Man walks the earth thinking that it is all his. Hashem sends him subtle reminders, "It is not yours; it is Mine." We make plans, some grandiose, others simple, thinking that their achievement rests in our hands. We forget the famous dictum concerning the "best laid plans of mice and men." There is a famous anecdote, related by Horav Yeruchem Levovitz, zl, which underscores this verity. A din Torah, litigation between two disputants, once took place in Volozhin, and its venerable Av Bais Din, Horav Chaim Volozhiner, zl, presided over the proceedings. The dispute concerned a parcel of land, with each of the men claiming that the land belonged to him. These men were obstinate, refusing to brook any form of compromise. Each one sought complete ownership over the land.

Rav Chaim asked to see the land in question. The litigants accompanied the Rav to the land that seemed to obsess each of these men. The Rav bent down to the ground, placing his ear directly on it, as if he was listening for something. It must have looked quite strange to see the venerable gadol hador, preeminent Torah leader of the generation, resting his ear on the ground. A few moments went by, and Rav Chaim arose, and said, "Gentlemen, I wanted to hear what the actual ground had to say concerning your disagreement. After all, it supposedly belongs to one of you. Do you know what the ground said concerning your dispute? It said, 'Why are they fighting over me? Who really cares who owns me? What does it really matter? At the end of the day, they will both belong to me.'"

The men took the hint and realized that worldly disputes are foolish. We are here as visitors for the short duration of our mortal lifespan. Nothing is forever. When our time is up - it is final. There are no reprieves. Regrettably, while we acknowledge this, it is a belief that most people fail to incorporate into their lifestyle and weltanschauung. We live as if there will always be a tomorrow, when, in fact, the "tomorrows" decrease with each day.

It all boils down to how we view life. Does it have meaning, or is it nothing more than an aggregate of fragments, bits and pieces, some meaningful, most not, with no connecting thread to bind them together? Living a disjointed life without focus and without purpose will lead us, when we get older and have a few moments to focus, to ask the searing question: What did I do with my life?

While everyone clearly wants to live a meaningful life, we forget the most important aspect of such a life: every minute, every hour, every day is precious. We ignore the constant messages from Above, as we focus on that "great opportunity," that chance of a lifetime, when we will make a difference. It just does not happen that way. To have a successful life, one must make use of every moment, every opportunity - never knowing which one will be "that" moment, "that" opportunity.

We are placed on this world for a purpose: to refine ourselves. This applies to every aspect of one's life - both physical and spiritual. When everything in one's life unites towards attaining that one goal of kavod Shomayim, the glory of Heaven, he has discovered the connecting thread that binds all the moments and opportunities together. By connecting to one's neshamah, soul, focusing on his spiritual dimension and living life with purpose, he adds meaning to his life. The day begins with Modeh Ani, recognizing the Creator and offering our gratitude. It ends with Shema Yisrael, affirming our faith in His Oneness. These are the day's "bookends." Everything in between is the life we "write." We are the

authors of our Book of Life. The best writer needs a competent editor. So, too, do we need rebbeim, mentors, to guide us on the path of life, to "edit" our "book," so that it becomes a best seller, a success, describing a wholesome life lived with meaning and purpose. If we live like that, we will no longer worry concerning who owns the land. As part of the bigger picture, that question has very little bearing.

***If your brother becomes impoverished and his means falter in your proximity, you shall strengthen him. (25:35)***

Tzedakah, which is generally translated as charity, means much more than exhibiting one's generosity towards his fellowman. It is not simply the means for imparting a favor; it is justice, derived from the word tzedek. In other words, "I" have, so, therefore, "you" must also have. The world was created with tzedek, justice, so that all are equal. The fact that some have more than others behooves them to share with others. After all, it is only right. The value which the benefactor accrues far exceeds his contribution, so great is the reward for giving the tzedakah. Tzedakah does not require kavanah, intention, for the mitzvah. Other mitzvos do require kavanah. Tzedakah is a mitzvah that focuses on the needs of the needy. As long as these needs are addressed, the benefactor has earned his reward. On the other hand, there is no question that the reward is magnified with the proper intention. The finer the kavanah, the greater the mitzvah. Protecting the beneficiary from embarrassment and preserving his self-esteem are factors in the efficacy of this mitzvah. Sacrifice plays a critical role in the mitzvah of tzedakah. While the primary objective is to support the beneficiary, how much the benefactor sacrifices to do so impacts his reward. Sacrifice is relative. Since personal value systems differs from person to person, sacrifice will be relative. For some, it means foregoing physical pleasure; for others, sacrifice is defined by spiritual renouncement. Helping someone during the time devoted to Torah study is for some people a supreme sacrifice. It all depends on how devoted one is to Torah and mitzvah observance. One famous story which imparts a number of lessons concerns Horav Mordechai, zl, m'Neshchiz. Rav Mordechai was a poor man who set aside every penny he had so that he could purchase a fine Lulav and Esrog, as the Four Species were rare and, thus, quite expensive. As he was going to purchase the Esrog, he encountered a man who was weeping bitterly. His inquiry revealed that this man made his meager living from hauling things with his wagon. His horse and wagon were his only means of earning a living. His horse had just died. He no longer had a way to earn a living. This was reason enough for him to cry. He was not mourning his horse. He just needed a horse.

The Rebbe asked him how much a new horse would cost. The wagon driver replied with an amount perfectly coinciding with the amount of money the Rebbe had saved for his Esrog. The Rebbe immediately took out his money purse and gave the man his money. "Here, go buy yourself a new horse, with my blessings," the Rebbe said. The man rushed off, overjoyed that he could now continue his livelihood.

As for the Rebbe, he turned his eyes Heavenward and said, "Ribono Shel Olam; Dear G-d, all other Jews will fulfill the mitzvah of the Four species with an Esrog and Lulav. I will do so with a horse!"

A number of tzedakah lessons can be derived from here. I would rather focus on another lesson - one that concerns mitzvah performance. Mitzvos are defined by the attitude manifest by the one who performs the mitzvah. We think that in order to fulfill a mitzvah it is necessary to have all of the hiddurim, beautifications and stringencies. While one should go to all lengths to carry out a mitzvah, this idea has limits. For example, having a beautiful Esrog which costs hundreds of dollars, yet not understanding the essence of the mitzvah; spending oodles of money on oneself while ignoring the plight of the fellow next door; spending thousands to celebrate the Sedarim in some unchartered island escape, yet remaining mute when the shul makes an appeal for Maos Chittim;

feeling that the only place to fulfill the mitzvah of Lulav and Esrog is at the Kosel; and the list goes on.

If one's attitude is correct, the mitzvah of Esrog can be fulfilled with a horse. If one's attitude is all about himself with very little place for Hashem, "where", "what" and "how much" will not make a difference.

***Parshas Bechukosai***

***But if you disdain My decrees. (26:15)***

There are forty-nine kelalos, curses, in the Tochechah, Admonition, of Sefer Vayikra. In the Talmud Megillah 31b, Chazal teach that the entire Admonition must be read in one Aliyah. The reading should not be interrupted for an Aliyah break to call another person up to the Torah. The sages derive this from a pasuk in Mishlei 3:11, Mussar Hashem beni al timaas, "Hashem's reproach, my son, do not disdain." In order for one to derive the full benefit of the lesson which is being taught, it is necessary that the lesson not be interrupted. Then the listener can grasp the message in its entirety. To interrupt mussar, reproach, in the middle is to risk losing part of the lesson.

Horav Yisrael Belsky, Shlita, quotes this Chazal and applies it to an episode which took place concerning the Chiddushei HaRim, the first Rebbe of Gur. He was an incredible talmid chacham, Torah scholar, whose focus was primarily on Torah study, a way of life which he preached to his chassidim. His shiurim, lectures, were outstanding, bordering on brilliant. One day, he gave a shiur during which he entered into very deep pilpul, dialectic. One by one, he lost his students, until finally no one was left who was following the Rebbe's thoughts. Sitting among his students was the Rebbe's own son. At the conclusion of the shiur, the Rebbe approached his son and began to chastise him for not having better prepared the lesson. In order to achieve success in the study of Talmud, one must expend effort, which he felt his son had not done. The Rebbe left disappointed, and it showed.

That evening, the Chiddushei HaRim walked by the bais ha'medrash and was shocked to hear his son brilliantly reviewing his father's shiur. Every nuance, every piece of logic, was clearly explained. There was no doubt that his son had lucidly captured every aspect of the shiur in its entirety. Furthermore, he was able to flawlessly explain it. He presented every detail expertly. There was no question that his son had grasped the shiur. Why had he not said so before his father chastised him?

This question bothered the Chiddushei HaRim. Had his son said something, it would have spared his father disappointment, and the son would have avoided embarrassment. The entire incident was unnecessary. The young man who was to become his father's successor replied that he acted upon a precedent set by the Bnei Gad and Bnei Reuven, in their dialogue with Moshe Rabbeinu regarding their desire to remain in the Trans Jordan.

Displeased with their request, Moshe criticized them, using strong terminology: "Behold! You have arisen in place of your fathers, a collection of sinful men, to add more to the angry fury of Hashem towards Yisrael!" (Bamidbar 32:14). Once Moshe concluded his admonition, they spoke up, saying that they had never intended to weaken the nation's resolve to take the land. On the contrary, they had planned to return to TransJordan after the war to liberate Eretz Yisrael from the pagans.

Why did they wait the duration of Moshe's rebuke to speak up? They could easily have interrupted and said, "Stop! Let us go back to the beginning. We are united with the people. We will support them in all their battles. We just want to live here." Essentially, Moshe's reproach was unnecessary. The lesson to be derived herein is that rebuke is precious. Every word of rebuke should be cherished when it emanates from the sincere mouth of a tzaddik, such as Moshe. It is an indication of pure love. Why would anyone want to cut short a sincere expression of love?

Rav Belsky elaborates upon this theme. A mussar shmues, discourse, has a specific standard. It is not some haphazard collection of a Rosh Yeshivah's grief concerning his students. It has a beginning, a middle, and an end, with a distinct thread running through the whole talk - connecting it all together. The shmues is comprised of various facets of expression - some include words of encouragement, and also words of rebuke - in a perfect balance. While, at times, the speaker conveys his message with an angry tone, it is all part of the structure, which become balanced words of love, hope and empowerment. At the end, a complete idea has emerged, and the student receives the full benefit of a complete lesson.

The Rosh Yeshivah applies this explanation to elucidate Chazal in the Talmud Megillah. It is a mistake to stop in the midst of a rebuke, because this interruption might render the rebuke intolerable. This is how we should understand the pasuk in Mishlei, which exhorts us not to disdain Hashem's rebuke. If we do not understand the Heavenly message; if it comes across as incomplete, or bitter-sounding, we ultimately reject the lesson it is there to teach us. We must concentrate on every word, listen to the entire message in its totality, then - and only then - will the significance impact us. Those who listen absorb the message and change their lives. Those who refuse to listen are just not with the program!

***Every valuation shall be in the sacred shekel. (27:25)***

Voluntary contributions to the Sanctuary were a significant source of funding for the maintenance of the Temple. One would think that the laws concerning such valuations would be placed earlier in Sefer Vayikra, which deals with the Temple offerings. Horav S.R. Hirsh, zl, explains that these gifts were excluded by design, lest one think that his contributions replaced mitzvah performance. Voluntary contributions do not atone for laxity in mitzvah observance.

The above pasuk teaches us that every evaluation is to be measured in Shekel ha'Kodesh, sacred shekel. Horav Moshe Shternbuch, Shlita, renders this pasuk homiletically to teach us a valuable lesson concerning how we are to give tzedakah, charity. Even the most philanthropic Jew must be acutely aware that charity must be given on a scale commensurate with the degree that one spends on himself. In other words, the percentage which he feels he is capable of doling out for his personal needs and pleasures should be balanced by a similar percentage for tzedakah. Likewise, in the same manner that he expects for himself, he should do for others. This does not mean that he must purchase an Armani suit for the indigent and those in need, but there is a vast difference between polyester and Armani: We must factor in the emotional needs of those we help, as well as their financial requirements. When we contribute to organizations, shuls, yeshivos, etc, we often become incredibly creative with a litany of excuses that would rival some of the most prolific authors of fiction. "My money is tied up"; "I am just not that liquid right now"; "I just took a big hit in my investment portfolio," etc. While these excuses might even be partially true, we would expect this person to exhibit some restraint in his personal spending, as well. This is, of course, not the case. When someone's financial portfolio takes a hit, the first ones to feel the pinch will be those who are beneficiaries of his charitable contributions.

Thus, the Torah teaches us "every valuation" - every penny that you spend on erkecha, your personal needs - shall be determined with the same measuring stick that you apply to the "sacred shekel." When you feel "tight" concerning tzedakah, you should likewise feel the pinch regarding your own needs. If you do not have for one - then you do not have for the other. Interestingly, when people apply this measuring device, they suddenly discover money which they "thought" they did not have. By all means, take that trip; purchase that suit; make that lavish celebration, but please remember those in need. They would also like to celebrate.

***Va'ani Tefillah***

***Shema Yisrael, Hashem Elokeinu... V'ahavta.***

Horav Yehudah Assad, zl, explains this as a two-part process. First, one believes b'emunah peshutah, with simple faith, as a result of his upbringing. His father and mother inculcate him with faith in the Almighty. Thus, a child grows up believing in Hashem, as a result of listening to his parents and accepting their teachings. As he grows older and develops greater proficiency in Torah scholarship, he begins to question his beliefs. He is now ready for the dialectic and analytic approach: to ask; listen; and to digest the answer. As a result of his newly-discovered answers, his understanding of Hashem achieves new profundity and broader acceptance within his psyche. This new approach enables him to develop a deep love for Hashem, something which had been unrealistic earlier. Without cognition, one cannot truly love. Blind love, which is not founded in reason, can, under duress, be forgotten. On the other hand, one cannot achieve understanding until after he has had the basic exposure from his parents to emunah peshutah.

This is the meaning of Shema Yisrael: First, one must listen to his parents and imbibe their teachings concerning Hashem. After he has studied Torah and developed a deeper understanding of the Almighty, he will have risen to the level of v'ahavta es Hashem, loving Hashem as a result of a deeper understanding of His ways.

Sponsored in memory of Mrs. Seliga Ahuva (Schur) Mandelbaum  
Seliga Ahuva bas Harav Daniel a"h 26 Iyar 5751  
by her family HoRav Doniel z"l & Shoshana Schur

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from: *Shabbat Shalom* <[shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org](mailto:shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org)>

reply-to: [shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org](mailto:shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org)

*Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb*

**Orthodox Union / [www.ou.org](http://www.ou.org)**

**Rabbi Weinreb's Parsha Column, Parshat Behar-Bechukotai**

***Sponsored in memory of Nathan and Louise Schwartz a"h***

***"The Process of Sin"***

It is a word that one hears frequently these days, in many contexts. The word is "process." It is a word that reflects our growing recognition that there are very few things in this world that occur in an instant, yesh me'ayin, something out of nothing.

When one faces a complex set of circumstances, he is well advised to assume that these circumstances did not arise out of nowhere, but, on the contrary, are the results of many prior events, some going back many years.

Hence, we speak of the processes of nature, the historical process, the process of aging, and even the process of disease.

The concept of life as a process may be traced back to the Greek philosopher, Heraclitus, who pointed out that one does not step into the same river twice. Life, like the river, does not stand still, and no two moments in life are identical.

From a Jewish perspective, everything is in the process of change. Everything, that is, except God Himself, who is unchanging and eternal. I first became aware of the philosophical importance of the notion of process in a course I took in graduate school on the great American philosophers of the 19th and early 20th centuries. In that course, I was introduced to the thought of Alfred North Whitehead, who wrote a book entitled *Process and Reality*. Although I remember finding that book very difficult to read, I can still recall the instructor's helpful analogy of life as a flowing river that continuously carves out new paths. As an example, she showed us old maps of the Mississippi River which

demonstrated that it changed course many times over the centuries but always had the same destination, the sea.

Much more recently, I attended a seminar in which a very prominent physician distinguished between those diseases that are the products of long-term processes of deterioration versus those diseases that are the result of sudden trauma with no previous pathology evident at all. As this doctor made his point, a participant in the seminar rose to protest. He identified himself as a "process philosopher" who believed that even sudden traumatic events are part of a subtle ongoing process which preceded them, rendering the individual susceptible to what appeared to be sudden trauma, but what was in reality only the inevitable outcome of a prior ongoing process. He insisted that even traumatic events, seemingly coming out of nowhere, are the culmination of a process. Whereas this philosopher's contention is surely debatable, what is not debatable is that sin is part of a process. Sins are not merely isolated events in a person's life. This point has its roots in this week's twin Torah portions, Behar and Bechukotai (Leviticus 25:1-27:34).

At the beginning of chapter 26, which appears near the end of the first of this week's portions, Behar, we read:

"You shall not make idols for yourselves, or set up for yourselves carved images or pillars, or place figured stones in your land to worship upon, for I am the Lord your God. You shall keep My Sabbaths and venerate my sanctuary..."

Rashi, the greatest of our traditional commentators, is puzzled by the placement of this particular simple verse. It follows the long and complex chapter 25, which discusses a great diversity of subjects: the sabbatical year; the transfer of merchandise and the sale of real property; laws of usury; the conditions which apply to a person who becomes destitute, who, when he has no other alternative, may even sell himself into slavery to another Jew.

Rashi responds, following a passage in the Talmud (Kiddushin 20a), that what we have in chapter 25 is a detailed account of a fundamental process of human nature, the process of sin.

Rashi tells us that sin typically proceeds in incremental fashion, from minor to major, from incidental and almost trivial infractions to a point where a person becomes trapped in a web of sin from which it is very difficult to extricate himself.

Thus, chapter 25 begins with the laws of the sabbatical year, alluding to a person who, in the interest of monetary gain, ignores those laws and does commerce with the fruits of that year. As punishment for this, his commercial plans are frustrated, and he must sell his merchandise to raise cash. If he then persists in his sins, he finds himself forced to sell off his fields, and then, still failing to repent, will become so desperate that he has to sell his very home. This process continues to spiral downward if he does not change his ways, and he finds himself so strapped financially that he must borrow money under usurious terms. Two parallel processes inexorably move forward: the process of deepening entrenchment in sin, and the process of ever worsening financial conditions.

But then, chapter 25 continues with even more disastrous consequences for this obdurate sinner, and, with no other alternative, he is forced to sell himself into slavery to a fellow Jew. But in this condition, he still has hope, because the Torah here implores other Jews to come forward and redeem this poor fellow from his enslavement. However, continues Rashi, if the sinner still does not get the message of his need to change his sinful ways, help will not come forth. Thus concludes chapter 25: "For it is to Me that the Israelites are servants: they are My servants, whom I freed from the land of Egypt, I the Lord your God." And the Talmud comments, "They are to be My servants, and not the servants of other, human, servants."

If such is the case, and that stubborn sinner still doesn't "get it," we have the opening statement of chapter 26, to which we've already referred.

"You shall not make idols for yourselves..."

These words are addressed, Rashi tells us, to our stubborn sinner who, even when sold to fellow Jews, remains unrepentant. He then finds it necessary to sell himself to non-Jews, to other nations. And he therefore needs to be reminded that, even in an alien environment, he must remain faithful to his God.

He cannot say, "My master is immoral, why can't I be? My master is idolatrous, why not me? My master violates the Sabbath, why shouldn't I?" Even at the nadir of his process, he is encouraged to repent and is admonished, "You shall not make idols for yourself..."

Sin is a process. Egregious sins have a history and are long preceded by minor, even trivial, infractions. That's the bad news.

The good news is that repentance is also a process. When one commits to change his ways, he need not be discouraged by the enormity of the task ahead. He need merely proceed, step by small step, in the right direction.

The process of teshuva, return, requires just a "re-turn," a small change in behavior. How encouraging are God's words, as phrased by our Sages, "Open for Me an opening the size of the eye of a needle, and I will open for you an opening as large as the door of a great Temple."

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<http://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Columnists/>

**Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz**

*Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz is rabbi of the Western Wall and Holy Sites*

**Parshat Behar-Behukotai: The commandment of shmita**

**By Shmuel Rabinowitz**

***"Six years you shall sow your field... But in the seventh year shall be a Sabbath of solemn rest for the land".***

The Torah portion that we read this Shabbat, Behar-Behukotai, begins with the commandment to cease working the land every seventh year, the year of shmita.

"When you come into the land, then shall the land keep a Sabbath unto the Lord. Six years you shall sow your field, and six years you shall prune your vineyard. But in the seventh year shall be a Sabbath of solemn rest for the land, a Sabbath unto the Lord; you shall neither sow your field, nor prune your vineyard.

"It shall be a year of solemn rest for the land. And the Sabbath-produce of the land shall be for food for you: for you, and for your servant and for your maid, and for your hired servant and for the settler by your side that sojourn with you; and for your cattle, and for the beasts that are in your land, shall all the increase thereof be for food."

(Leviticus 25: 2-7) For six years, the farmer worked his fields – plowing, seeding, reaping, pruning and harvesting. And then, after six years of hard work – a strike! The entire farm is paralyzed for a full year, 354 days (a lunar year); a general work stoppage.

Why? For what purpose? Who benefits? For six years, man lives in a never-ending race for his livelihood and sustenance, money and status. He seeds his fields and enjoys nice profits from his harvest. For six years, the state is ruled by the laws of supply and demand, fluctuations of rates and prices. And of course, all this is sprinkled with a little cheating which might benefit business but damages the soul.

And then an amazing change occurs. In the midst of all the bustle of life, the huge machine which pulls man into the realm of chasing money stops. Not for two days or for a week. For one full year – no work. For a whole year, man stands in front of his property as a guest and not an owner. Now, during this year, the harvest of the fields are not yours, dear farmer, but "for you, for your servant and for your maid, and for your hired servant and for the settler... and for your cattle, and for the beasts."

For this year, dear farmer, you are equal to the servant, the settler, the cattle and the beast. For this year, the land belongs to everyone. To teach you, that also for the six years during which you worked the land, you were not its owner, but in charge of treating it righteously and honestly, giving of your land's harvest to the weak and needy, to the fringes of society, and even to cattle and beasts.

A story is told about two Jews who were fighting over a piece of land. One claimed that the land was his while the other claimed it was his. The issue reached the courts, but even there a decision was not reached. With no choice left, they turned to the rabbi of the city to arbitrate between them.

The rabbi heard their claims and agreed that the decision was indeed a difficult one. He turned to them and said, "I would like to see the piece of land under dispute. Please accompany me."

The two left along with the rabbi outside of town to examine the disputed land. When they arrived, the rabbi suddenly leaned down and put his ear to the ground, and listened...

The two people claiming ownership of the land watched this odd scene and could not hide their surprise. The rabbi smiled at them and said, "I heard your claims and saw that indeed, the decision on this issue is difficult for me. I decided to hear what the land itself had to say – what it thought and to whom it belonged."

The two men stared at the rabbi in confusion mixed with pity, but the rabbi continued, "And what do you think the land answered? It claims that it belongs to neither of you. On the contrary, the two of you belong to it! Why must they fight and argue, said the land, since today or tomorrow they will both come to me..."

The two men understood the rabbi's obvious hint and in complete embarrassment, they looked down to the ground and immediately agreed to compromise.

The lesson we learn from the commandment of shmita is still relevant today when most people no longer work in agriculture. So long as man walks the earth and feels a sense of ownership over it, he must be reminded: The property you own was given to you not so that you will reap personal profits from it, but so that you will treat it justly, honestly and with compassion; so that you always remember the poor and the weak and assist them with your money.

Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz is rabbi of the Western Wall and Holy Sites. All rights reserved © 1995 - 2012 The Jerusalem Post.

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**from:** Rabbi Chanan Morrison <ravkooklist@gmail.com>  
**to:** Rav Kook List <Rav-Kook-List@googlegroups.com>  
**subject:** [Rav Kook List]  
**mailing list:** rav-kook-list.googlegroups.com

**Rav Kook List**  
**Rav Kook on the Torah Portion**  
***Bechukotai: Why Exile?***

The Torah warns us that if we fail to listen to God and keep His mitzvot, we will be punished with famine, war, and ultimately, exile.

"I will scatter you among the nations, and keep the sword drawn against you. Your land will remain desolate, and your cities in ruins." (Lev. 26:33)

The Purpose of Israel in their Land

Why should the Jewish people be punished with exile? To answer this question, we must first understand the true significance of residing in the Land of Israel. If the goal of the Jewish people is to bring ethical monotheism to the world, would their mission not be more effectively fulfilled when they are scattered among the nations?

There is, however, a unique reason for the Jewish people to live in the Land of Israel. They need to dwell together in the Land so that there will be a nation in the world upon whom God's honor rests; a nation for whom Divine providence is revealed in its history and circumstances; a nation that will be a source for all peoples to absorb knowledge of God and His ways. Their goal is to demonstrate that Divine morality can fill an entire nation - a morality that enlightens not only the private lives of individuals, but also guides the public paths of nations.

For the Jewish people to fulfill their national destiny, God's seal must be placed on the people as a whole. The nation must recognize its special mission as God's people living in His land. When the Jewish people as a whole abandoned God, even though many individuals still kept some of the mitzvot, the nation had lost their distinctive mark. The land was no longer recognizable as God's land, and the nation was no longer recognizable as God's nation. They saw themselves as a people like all others.

At that point, the Jewish people required exile. They needed to wander among the nations, stripped of all national assets. During this exile, they discovered that they are different and distinct from all other peoples.

They realized that the essence of their nationhood contains a special quality; and that special quality is God's Name that is associated with them.

Staying in Babylonia

We find in the Talmud (Shabbat 41a) a startling opinion regarding the nature of exile. When fourth-century scholar Rabbi Zeira wished to ascend to the Land of Israel, he needed to evade his teacher, Rabbi Yehudah. For Rabbi Yehudah taught that anyone leaving Babylonia for the Land of Israel transgresses the positive command, "They will be carried to Babylon, and there they shall stay, until the day that I remember them" (Jeremiah 27:22). (Rabbi Zeira, however, disagreed with this interpretation. He held that the prophecy only referred to vessels of the holy Temple.)

Why did Rabbi Yehudah think that moving to the Land of Israel was so improper?

Babylonia at that time was the world center of Torah study. Great academies were established in Neharde'a, Sura and Pumbeditha. Jewish life in Babylonia was centered around the holiness of Torah. This great revival of Torah learning instilled a profound recognition of the true essence of the Jewish people. As such, Babylonia was the key to the redemption of Israel and their return to their land. Only when the Jewish people fully assimilate this lesson will the exile have fulfilled its purpose, and the Jewish people will be able to return to their land. Rabbi Yehudah felt that individuals, even if they have already prepared themselves sufficiently for the holiness of the Land of Israel, should nonetheless remain in Babylonia. Why? The object of exile is not to correct the individual, but to correct the nation. The true significance of the Jewish people living in the Land of Israel - as an entire nation bearing the banner of the Rock of Israel - must not be obscured by the return of righteous individuals to the Land.

For Rabbi Yehudah, each individual Jew is like a Temple vessel. A vessel cannot fulfill its true purpose by itself, without the overall framework of a functioning Temple. So too, an individual can only join in the renaissance of Israel in their Holy Land when the entire nation has been restored in its Land, via Divine redemption.

(Gold from the Land of Israel, pp. 218-220. Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. IV, p. 2)

[Note: Maimonides ruled that "Just as one may not leave the Land of Israel, so too one may not leave Babylonia" (Laws of Kings 5:12). It is not clear, however, whether the prohibition to leave Babylonia included ascending to the Land of Israel or not (see Kesef Mishneh ad. loc, Pe'at Hashulchan, Eretz Hemdah pp. 30-34).

With the gradual decline of Babylonia as the center of Jewish scholarship during the Middle Ages, this prohibition became irrelevant, and is not mentioned in the Shulchan Aruch. See also Pischei Teshuvah (Even HaEzer 75:6), who ruled that the mitzvah of ascending to the Land of Israel applies to all times.]  
Comments and inquiries may be sent to:  
mailto:RavKookList@gmail.com

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**From Jeffrey Gross <jgross@torah.org>**  
**reply-To neustadt@torah.org, genesis@torah.org**  
**To weekly-halacha@torah.org**  
**Subject Weekly Halacha**  
**by Rabbi Doniel Neustadt (dneustadt@cordetroit.com)**  
**Yoshev Rosh - Vaad HaRabanim of Detroit**

**Weekly Halacha**  
**by Rabbi Doniel Neustadt**

### *Torah Reading for Parashas Bechukosai*

This week's public Torah reading of Parashas Bechukosai, though seemingly no different from any other, is, in fact, governed by a set of special halachos. Let us take the opportunity to review them.

Bechukosai is sometimes read together with Behar and sometimes not. Several factors enter into this determination, among them Ezra ha-Sofer's ordinance that Bechukosai be read at least two weeks before the festival of Shavuos. The reason for the two-week hiatus is based on our tradition that Shavuos is considered a New Year, a Day of Judgment for the fruits of the tree. We are particular, therefore, to be finished with Parashas Bechukosai—in which the Admonition, the tochachah and its curses, occupy a central role—before this Day of Judgment and New Year begin.<sup>2</sup> For the same reason we read Parashas Ki Savo, where the other portion of the tochachah is written, at least two weeks before Rosh Hashanah, so that “the old year may be ushered out along with its curses.”

Question: Who is called to the Torah for the reading of the tochachah?  
Discussion: In past generations, deciding whom to call to the Torah for the reading of the tochachah was a serious point of contention. Many people, even learned individuals, felt that being called to the Torah for this portion was a bad omen that would result in tragedy and misfortune.<sup>3</sup> Over the years, the situation deteriorated to the extent that a congregant would have to be paid to accept the aliyah,<sup>4</sup> and if no one would agree to be “hired”, the Torah reading of the week (and of Parashas Ki Savo) was omitted altogether.<sup>5</sup> In other communities, shul decorum was shattered while congregants fought and bickered as to who, in their opinion, should be “punished” by being called up for this portion.<sup>6</sup> In some communities, the gabbai publicly announced from the bimah that whoever wished to do so should volunteer for the aliyah,<sup>7</sup> while in other communities this part of the reading was read by the Torah reader without anybody being called up.<sup>8</sup> Most poskim were critical of and dissatisfied with all of these options.<sup>9</sup>

Consequently, it has become customary in many shuls for the Torah reader himself to be called<sup>10</sup> upon to read the tochachah. Indeed, even if the reader is a kohen, the aliyos must be rearranged so that the tochachah is included in the aliyah of the kohen. Even when Bechukosai is read together with Behar, it should be arranged that the aliyah for the tochachah will be the last aliyah (acharon), so that the Torah reader who is a kohen will be called for the aliyah of the tochachah. Although the general rule is that whenever two parashiyos are connected, it is proper

to connect them at the fourth aliyah,<sup>11</sup> we do not follow the rule in this case.<sup>12</sup>

If, mistakenly, the gabbai called a person other than the reader to the aliyah of the tochachah, that person may not refuse the aliyah. Even if he knows that the gabbai had malicious intentions when calling him up, he still may not refuse the aliyah once he has been called up. If, however, he knows in advance that he will be called, he may walk out of the shul before being called up.<sup>13</sup>

It is prohibited to “interrupt” during the reading of the tochachah, i.e., the portion cannot be broken into two or more segments to accommodate more aliyos.<sup>14</sup> If, however, a mistake was found in the Sefer Torah during the reading of the tochachah, a new sefer should be brought out and the reading continued. In the opinion of several poskim, this is not considered to be an “interruption” because the same person who was called to the Torah remains there.<sup>15</sup>

The custom is to read the tochachah in a lowered tone of voice,<sup>16</sup> but not so quietly that it not be heard by the congregation.<sup>17</sup> Chazak! Chazak! V'nischazeik!

At the end of this parashah, as with every parashah that completes the reading of an entire Chumash, the custom is for the congregation to call out “Chazak! Chazak! V'nischazeik!”<sup>18</sup> Several reasons are offered for this custom.<sup>19</sup> The person who was called up for this aliyah should not say Chazak. Since he must still recite the final blessing after the Torah reading, some poskim consider reciting Chazak as an improper interruption (hefsek).<sup>20</sup>

The custom is that the reader repeats Chazak after the congregation. The Sefer Torah should be closed at the time so that it does not appear as if those words are being read from the Torah.<sup>21</sup>

- 1 In the rare case of Rosh Hashanah falling on a Thursday at the beginning of a leap year, Bechukosai is read three weeks before Shavuos.
- 2 Beir Halachah 428:4, s.v. u'lolam, quoting the Levush, based on Megilah 31b and Tosfos.
- 3 There are a number of early sources who express this fear, see Magen Avraham 428:8 quoting Maharil; Kaf ha-Chayim 428:34 quoting Sefer Chasidim. See also Rama, O.C. 53:19.
- 4 Chelkas Yaakov 3:174 reports that this was the custom in Belz in Europe.
- 5 Beir Halachah, O.C. 428:6, s.v. b'pesukim.
- 6 In one community the gabbai, a tailor, “punished” a competing tailor with this “honor.” The gabbai did not live out the year (heard from Rav Y. Kamenetsky).
- 7 Rama, O.C. 428:6, according to the understanding of the Machatzis ha-Shekel. Divrei Yisrael 1:61 testifies that this was the prevailing custom in Hungary.
- 8 Sho'el u'Meishiv 5:9.
- 9 Ha-elef Lecha Shelomo 63; Minchas Elazar 1:66; Igros Moshe, O.C. 2:35.
- 10 Generally, when the reader himself receives an aliyah, there is no need to call him by name, since he is standing at the bimah regardless; Rama, O.C. 139:3 and Mishnah Berurah 8.
- 11 Mishnah Berurah 282:5.
- 12 Mishnah Berurah 428:17 and Beir Halachah, s.v. b'psukim.
- 13 Mishnah Berurah 53:58; 428:17.
- 14 O.C. 428:6.
- 15 Kaf ha-Chayim 143:38; 428:32. There are dissenting opinions who hold that the reader should continue reading until the end of the tochachah; see Pischei Teshuvah 428:6 and She'arim Metzuyananim b'Halachah 78:3.
- 16 Magen Avraham 428:8.
- 17 Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 78:4; Kaf ha-Chayim 428:38.
- 18 Some say Chazak three times; Aruch ha-Shulchan 139:15.

19 See Maharam Mintz 85. See also Rama, O.C. 139:11 and Peri Chadash.

20 See Ketzos ha-Shulchan 84:22, Shevet ha-Levi 7:202 and Yagel Yaakov, pg. 141.

21 Bein Pesach l'Shavuos, pg. 145.

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Rabbi Neustadt is the Yoshev Rosh of the Vaad Harabbonim of Detroit and the Av Beis Din of the Beis Din Tzedek of Detroit. He could be reached at [dneustadt@cordetroit.com](mailto:dneustadt@cordetroit.com)

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