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From: [cshulman@gmail.com](mailto:cshulman@gmail.com)

## INTERNET PARSHA SHEET ON **BEHAR BECHUKOSAI** - 5778

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from: Destiny Foundation/Rabbi Berel Wein <[info@jewishdestiny.com](mailto:info@jewishdestiny.com)>  
reply-to: [info@jewishdestiny.com](mailto:info@jewishdestiny.com)  
subject: Weekly Parsha from Rabbi Berel Wein  
**Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog**

### **Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog** **BEHAR**

Much comment has been made over the centuries regarding the fact that the Torah introduces this week's reading by stating that its revelation took place at the mountain of Sinai. Rashi says that this is to emphasize that the Torah is of divine origin, which is represented in human terms by the mountain of Sinai.

There is great significance to describe and identify Godly instructions in terms of a mountain. Perhaps out of all the wonders of our natural world, great mountains inspire and influence us in the most challenging way. I have often wondered why human beings are driven to risk their lives to climb and scale mountains. After all, once one has somehow successfully reached the peak of Mount Everest then the only thing left to do is to come down again. Climbing a mountain is just climbing a mountain. Yet we are always witness to the fact that human beings constantly climb, usually at great financial expense and mortal physical risk. There is something within us that demands that we challenge the mountain and overcome it, so to speak, by reaching its peak and asserting our most human of characteristics – curiosity, adventure, risk-taking and challenging the unknown. If that be true as it is in the natural and physical world that we inhabit, so too is it valid as an understanding of our reach for spirituality and service to the omnipotent and omniscient Creator.

All father Abraham originally described as his spiritual goal that the city of Jerusalem and its location be represented as a mountain. Even though the rabbis of the Talmud softened this view and saw Jerusalem as a house and a

home, it nevertheless still retains the view of Abraham, as being a mountain. It is not easily accessible to arrive there physically or spiritually. Its terrain is difficult, and its streets are composed of hills and valleys, and ups and downs.

The physical Jerusalem is always representative of the spiritual Jerusalem that hovers above it. It takes great effort and patience to climb the mountain of spirituality that Jerusalem represents. Cloaked in the mundane problems of crowded urban living, it nevertheless retains within it the ability to connect human beings to greater heights of attitude, behavior and vision. But the playing field is not the level one. Rather it resembles a steep mountain that to be scaled and often there are great risks in doing so.

The simple fool says that just being a good person is sufficient without the ritual and paraphernalia of religion and its observance. However, the wise person realizes that it takes preparation, tools, and enormous effort to just be a good person. The observances that the Torah demands of us are themselves the tools that allow us to attempt to scale that great mountain that lies before each and every one of us. Those tools are described for us by the tradition of the mountain of Sinai.

Shabbat shalom  
Rabbi Berel Wein

### **BECHUKOTAI**

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.

Shabbat shalom  
Rabbi Berel Wein

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fw from hamelaket@gmail.com  
from: Rabbi Chanan Morrison <chanan@ravkooktorah.org>  
to: rav-kook-list@googlegroups.com  
subject: [Rav Kook Torah]

### **Jerusalem Day: Zion and Jerusalem RAV KOOK TORAH**

A Warning from Eretz Yisrael

The sages in Eretz Yisrael were furious. True, Hananiah was a great scholar, among the greatest of his generation. But even after he left for Babylon, Hananiah continued to set the Jewish calendar, deciding whether to add a leap month and determining the first day of the month.

The sages dispatched two messengers to Hananiah with the following warning: "If you insist on setting the calendar outside of Israel, then go build your own altar and publicly declare that you and your community in Babylon have left the Jewish people and no longer belong to the God of Israel." The Babylonian Jews were stunned to hear this message, wailing, "Heaven forbid! We are still part of the Jewish people!"

Why were the sages so disturbed by Hananiah's setting the calendar in Babylon? The Talmud (Berachot 63b) explains that their response was based on the verse, "For Torah will go forth out of Zion, and God's word from Jerusalem" (Isaiah 2:3). The source of Torah - including determining the Jewish calendar - is Jerusalem and the land of Israel.

Why is it so important that Jerusalem be the center of Torah instruction?  
Zion and Jerusalem

We must first understand this verse, "For Torah will go forth out of Zion, and God's word from Jerusalem." What is the difference between 'Zion' and 'Jerusalem'?

While Zion and Jerusalem refer to the same locale, they indicate different aspects of the holy city. The word 'Zion' literally means 'marked' or 'distinctive.' It refers to those inner qualities that distinguish the Jewish people, "a nation who dwells alone" (Num. 23:9) with their own unique spiritual traits and aspirations. The name 'Jerusalem,' on the other hand, indicates the city's function as a spiritual center for the entire world, influencing the nations of the world. 'Jerusalem' is the means by which Israel's spirit of holiness penetrates and uplifts the inner life of distant peoples.

In short, 'Zion' looks inward, emphasizing the city's internal significance for the Jewish people, while 'Jerusalem' looks outward, stressing the city's universal role as a spiritual focal point for the world.

It is axiomatic that the spirit of Torah and its ideals can only flourish when the Jewish people observe the Torah's mitzvot. For this reason, the verse first stipulates that "Torah will go forth out of Zion." First the Jewish people must follow Torah and its mitzvot; only then can God's word disseminate from Jerusalem to the rest of the world. The two parts of the verse thus correspond to the dual aspects of Zion-Jerusalem. First there must be Torah in Zion, focusing inward. Then "the word of God" - the universal prophetic message - can spread to the rest of the world, emanating from 'Jerusalem,' the international quality of the holy city.

The Sun and the Moon

What does all of this have to do with setting the calendar? There are two aspects to setting the Jewish calendar. The first is to determine the hour of the new moon, and the second is to calculate whether it is necessary to intercalate an extra month so that the lunar cycle will remain in sync with the solar year and the seasons.

In rabbinical literature, the sun is often a metaphor for the nations of the world, while the moon represents the Jewish people. Thus the two calculations of the calendar correspond to the two aspects of Zion-Jerusalem. We need to determine the time of the new moon in order to observe the special lunar calendar of Israel - this is the internal Torah of Zion. And we need to declare a leap year in order to maintain the proper balance between the lunar year of Israel and the solar year of the nations - this corresponds to the universal message emanating from Jerusalem.

The Torah of an Entire Nation

But why must the Jewish calendar be set in the land of Israel? The restriction on setting the calendar in Eretz Yisrael reflects a fundamental axiom of Torah. For the Torah to influence and enlighten the world, it must be established as a complete Torah, a Torah that governs all spheres of life. By setting the calendar outside of Israel, Hananiah disconnected the Torah from the myriad aspects of life as a nation living in its own land. He reduced the Torah to a personal religion that only relates to the ethical refinement of the individual and one's private connection to God. Such an approach impoverishes the multifaceted richness of Torah. As the sages warned Hananiah, this was akin to setting up a private altar to serve God - an irreparable break from the true goal of Torah and the people of Israel. To thwart such misguided views, the prophet declared, "For the sake of Zion I will not be silent" (Isaiah 62:1). First, Zion's status as the center of Torah must be firmly established. Only then will the continuation of this prophecy be fulfilled: "Then the nations will see your righteousness, and all kingdoms your honor."

(Silver from the Land of Israel (now available in paperback). Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. II on Berachot 63b (9:330).)

See also: The Kotel - Stones with Hearts

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fw from hamelaket@gmail.com  
from: Mordechai Tzion toratravaviner@yahoo.com  
to: ravaviner@yahoogroups.com  
http://www.ravaviner.com/  
Yeshivat Ateret Yerushalayim

From the teachings of the Rosh Yeshiva

**Rav Shlomo Aviner Shlit" a**

Yerushalayim - The Highest Place in the World!

The Gemara says that the Land of Israel is higher than any other place in the world (Zevachim 54b). In Parashat Shoftim, the Torah says that if you have a difficult halachic question or court case and need to go to the Sanhedrin, which is located in the Temple in Jerusalem, "you should arise and ascend to the place" (Devarim 17:8). Regardless of where one is located, he has to ascend to get there. Based on this, the Gemara says that the Temple is higher than any place in the Land of Israel (ibid.).

How can the Gemara make such a claim? Mt. Everest and the Himalayas are higher than Mt. Chermom - the highest spot in Israel?! Ironically, Israel has the lowest point on earth - the Dead Sea, not the highest!

The Radvaz, who lived about 500 years ago in Tzefat, explains how the Temple Mount lost its crown as the highest spot in Israel. He writes that the non-Jews lowered its height as it says, "Raze it, raze it, to its foundation" (Tehillim 137:7). The non-Jewish kings dug up the Temple Mount in order to build their houses, temples and churches higher than it. Furthermore, the rains flowed down the incline of the Temple Mount and instead of preventing the razing, they encouraged it. An earthquake also caused much destruction in Jerusalem and people built houses on the rubble. There is one archeological layer on top of another in Jerusalem. Archeological digs do not reveal virgin earth, but the remnants of earlier periods. Thus, while Jerusalem became higher, the Temple Mount was lowered, but it once was the highest spot (Shut Ha-Radvaz vol. 2 #639)

The Chatam Sofer - Rav Moshe Sofer, who lived in Pressberg, Hungary about 200 years ago and was never in Israel, says that reality does not

substantiate the Radvaz's claim that the Temple Mount was once the highest spot in Israel. He provides an answer from a completely different perspective by focusing on the statement that the Land of Israel is the highest spot in the world. The Chatam Sofer explains that the earth is a sphere and it is therefore impossible to definitively say which is the highest point. Everything is dependent on how one holds the sphere. If you hold the earth in a proper way than Israel, Jerusalem and the Temple Mount are the highest places. If you hold the sphere in a different way, someplace else will be on top.

The essential job of a Jew is to have a proper perspective in life to ensure that Israel, Jerusalem and the Temple Mount are always at the pinnacle (Chatam Sofer to Devarim 17:8).

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from: Aish.com <newsletterserver@aish.com> via em.secureserver.net  
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subject: Advanced Parsha - Behar-Bechukotai  
Behar (Leviticus 25:1-26:2)

**by Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks**  
**We Are What We Do Not Own**  
**Behar-Bechukotai 5778**

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 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-à-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 [1] that he was probably better at making money than giving it away, and that [2] 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.

Shabbat Shalom.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

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from: Ohr Somayach <ohr@ohr.edu>  
to: weekly@ohr.edu  
subject: Torah Weekly

**Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parshat Behar**  
**For the week ending 12 May 2018 / 27 Iyyar 5778**  
**Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com**  
**Insights**

**Breaking the Barriers**

**“If your brother becomes impoverished...” (25:35)**

It’s been a while since I visited London in the summer.

Last week I got back from a brief trip there. The weather was glorious. After one of the worst winters in years, the country was luxuriating in a proverbial English Summer day. And of course crowds thronged the streets and parks, everyone keen to cast off their memories of winter, together with much of their clothes, in an unabashed display of public indecency.

Apart from making parks a virtual no-go zone for someone who is striving to guard his eyes, I felt sorry for all those bright young souls.

A Victorian girl at least had high necklines and crinolines to flatter her imperfect form, but, nowadays, brutal hours of sweat at the gym are de rigeur to even make the qualifying rounds. In our civilization the body rules as never before. It’s all about being the most beautiful sculpted animal, so to speak.

“A man who shall take his sister... and he shall see her nakedness... it is a disgrace...” (20:17).

The Hebrew word for “disgrace” here is chessed, usually translated as “kindness.” Clearly incest cannot be construed as “kindness.” What then is chessed?

If someone comes up to you who is clearly starving, and asks you for some money because he hasn’t eaten in days, and you give him money for a meal — that isn’t chessed. That’s called being a normal human being.

If someone comes up to you who is clearly starving, and asks you for money for food, and you respond by taking him home, sitting him down at your table, and serving him a meal fit for a king, and then send him on his way with money in his pocket and a bulging take-home basket of goodies under his arm — that’s chessed.

Chessed means forcing yourself to go beyond your comfort zone. Chessed can be breaking through the barriers of your normal selfishness, but it can also be breaking through the natural instinctive barriers of inappropriate intimacy.

Secular society standards inevitably influence the “Jewish World” to some extent. Today there are debates even within the wider Orthodox community about subjects that would have been totally shocking 50 years ago, ideas that the Torah unequivocally calls to’eva, an abomination.

“If your brother becomes impoverished...”

We live in an era of spiritual impoverishment, a world of almost total physicality.

What we can do?

G-d designed this world as a symbiotic creation. If we are prepared to break through the boundaries of our own spirituality, venture out of our little cocoons and do just a little bit more — say berachot a little better — learn Torah better, really do chessed — the result must be that the light of holiness will shine once again in the world.

Sources: “Chessed” idea based on Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe

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fw from hamelaket@gmail.com

from: Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald <ezbuchwald@njop.org>

subject: Weekly Torah Message From Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald

**njop.org**

**Rabbi Buchwald's Weekly Torah Message**

**Behar-Bechukotai 5778-2018**

**“Torah From Sinai”**

“Torah From Sinai”

by Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald

The opening verses of parashat Behar, the first of this week’s combined parashiyot, Behar and Bechukotai, speak of the laws of Shemittah, שְׁמִטָּה, the commandment to let the land lie fallow and unworked during the sabbatical year that occurs every seven years, and during the Yovel, יוֹבֵל, the Jubilee year, every 50 years.

The opening verse of parashat Behar, Leviticus 25:1, reads: וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר, וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר, and the L-rd spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai saying. G-d tells

Moses to speak to the Children of Israel and tell them that when they enter the land of Israel that He will give them, the land must observe a Sabbath rest for the L-rd. The people shall sow their fields for six years, prune their vineyards and gather in their crops. But the seventh year, shall be a complete rest for the land, “A Sabbath for the L-rd. Your field you shall not sow, and your vineyard you shall not prune.”

By leaving the fields untended and unguarded for a year, the Jews boldly demonstrate that the world belongs to G-d and that they are merely its caretakers (Behar-Bechukotai 5764-2004).

In one of his most famous comments, Rashi, inquires, “Why does the Torah mention that the mitzvah of Shemittah was given at Mount Sinai? Weren’t all the mitzvot given at Mount Sinai?” In response, Rashi answers, “Just as the mitzvah of Shemittah was given with all its details at Sinai, so were all the mitzvot given with all of their details at Mount Sinai.”

Rabbi Shimon Schwab, in his commentary on Chumash, responds that the mitzvah of Shemittah, of requiring the land to lie fallow, is proof that the Torah was actually given in full at Sinai, and therefore singularly poised to be held up as a mitzvah that the Children of Israel received in all its details at Sinai.

Rabbi Schwab argues that had the Torah been written by ancient scholars, as some suggest, the mitzvah of Shemittah would have been omitted. Mortals would have found this law, which requires the entire country’s crops to lie fallow for a full year, to be untenable. Even though allowing the land to rest provides many benefits, leaving all the fields barren during the same year leaves the people without sufficient food. More logical, would have been to allow different parcels of land to rest on different years, not all in the same year. Besides, says Rabbi Schwab, the idea to leave all the lands fallow for two consecutive years, as the Torah requires during the seventh year of Shemittah and the eighth year of Yovel, in the Jubilee year, could not be the product of the human mind.

Rabbi Schwab concludes that the only one who could possibly know that there would be abundant food in the sixth year to last through the seventh and eight years, is G-d Himself, and therefore only He could have conceived of a mitzvah such as this.

Therefore, says Rabbi Schwab, it is incontrovertible that this mitzvah was proclaimed by the L-rd Al-mighty Himself. It is the mitzvah of Shemittah that confirms that all the mitzvot and all the teachings of the Torah were given at Sinai along with all of their details.

I have often argued that if one wants to find G-d, the best place to look for Him is in the “book,” the Torah, which is reputed to have been given by G-d Himself at Sinai.

The Torah, which is the original source of so many revolutionary ideas that are fundamental to human life, could not possibly have been conceived by humans. Collectively, these revolutionary ideas form a compelling argument for the divinity of the Bible.

The idea of the Sabbath, a day of rest for humankind, the bold declaration, “Thou shalt not murder,” pronouncing the sanctity of life, the concept of not causing undue pain to animals, the revolutionary idea of guarding the environment, were all introduced over 3300 years ago in the Torah.

Most of these exalted ideas were either never considered or summarily rejected by all other ancient civilizations. Not muzzling an animal while it works in the field, returning a lost object of a friend or even an enemy, not eating the limb of an animal while it is still alive, the prohibition against human sacrifice, the pursuit of justice and righteousness in law, not favoring one litigant over the other, the concept of majority rules, of not speaking evil against a neighbor, of getting rid of one’s bodily waste in a sanitary manner—all of these exalted ideas were not even a glimmer in the minds of other ancient civilizations.

The fact that the Torah (Deuteronomy 12:21), states that, “You shall slaughter the animals the way I have commanded you,” and yet there are no instructions found in the Torah, not only indicates that written words of the Torah are of Divine origin, but that an oral code of Divine origin, was given

along with the written Torah at the same time. In fact, the written code, in many instances, can hardly be understood without the elucidation of the oral code.

3300 years ago, the Torah introduced to humanity the idea of monotheism, which not only mandates the worship of a single G-d, but also posits the indispensability of a single ethical system, with absolute values and absolute morality that cannot be changed or modified.

It was in this light that Judaism introduced the concept of the sanctity of life, the sanctity of property and the sanctity of marriage.

Other civilizations argued that resting on the Sabbath day was a waste of precious time, and that allowing the land to lie fallow was only for fools who wish to wreck the economy of their lands. Most ancient civilizations maintained a belief in a legal system that allowed for superior rights for nobles and inferior rights for slaves and serfs. Judaism, 3300 years ago, declared, Deuteronomy 10:19, וְאָהַבְתֶּם אֶת הַזָּרָה, You shall love the stranger. This commandment, which is repeated 36 times, more than any other commandment in the Torah, was a radical departure from all other contemporary ancient civilizations.

While it is impossible for a mortal to truly comprehend the Immortal, or for the finite to truly comprehend the Infinite, the astounding number of revolutionary ideas that are contained in the Torah, certainly make a compelling case for G-d’s existence, and serve as a powerful refutation of those who doubt G-d’s existence and the divinity of His Torah.

*May you be blessed.*

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fw from hamelaket@gmail.com

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

reply-to: ryfrand@torah.org,

to: ravfrand@torah.org

subject: Rabbi Frand on Parsha

**Rav Yissocher Frand - Parshas Behar**

***Shemittah, Mt. Sinai, and the Life's Ultimate Challenge***

***You've Done it Once—You can do it Again***

Parshas Behar begins with the pesukim, “Hashem spoke to Moshe on Mount Sinai saying: Speak to the Children of Israel and say to them, when you come into the land that I give you, the land shall observe a Sabbath rest for Hashem” [Bamidbar 25:1-2]. In one of the most famous Rashis in all of Chumash, Rashi asks: “What is the subject of shemittah doing next to Mount Sinai?” All the mitzvot were given on Sinai, so why does the Torah — only here by shemittah — introduce the associated laws by specifying that they were given at Sinai?

Rashi gives one answer to this question, the Ramban mentions another. I would like to quote an answer I saw brought in the name of the Oznayim L’Torah, from Rav Zalman Sorotzkin. However, I would like to preface it with another interesting observation that I saw, which will help give a better understanding of the comment of the Oznayim L’Torah.

Chazal cross-reference a pasuk in Psalms to the mitzvah of shemittah: “Bless Hashem, O His angels; the strong warriors who do His bidding, to obey the voice of His word” [Tehillim 103:20]. The Psalmist is asking the Master of the Universe to give a blessing to “the Mighty Ones,” the ones who do His wishes, to listen to His words. The Medrash says that the term “the Mighty Ones” in this pasuk is referring to people who observe the shemittah. In normal circumstances, a person does a mitzvah for one hour, one day, one week, or one month. However, shemittah is a mitzvah that is done for a whole year! It may be hard to abstain from forbidden work on Shabbos — for a day — but we do observe that mitzvah. It may be hard to not eat chametz for a week, but we do that mitzvah as well. However, most mitzvot which require sacrifice have a relatively short time duration.

The mitzvah of shemittah is different. Shemittah requires people to sit and do nothing, and to forgo their normal means of earning a living, for an entire year. That is a real sacrifice! The farmer needs to watch his field lie fallow.

He must watch his neighbors come and take that which grows on its own from his field (because it is all hefker [ownerless]). He sees the animals come in and eat to their delight, and he needs to sit there and do nothing for the entire year! This is very difficult.

The Gemara applies to this the Mishnaic statement in Ethics of the Fathers: “Who is the mighty person? It is he who conquers his evil inclination.” A person who has the strength of character to listen to the Almighty, and have faith that He will provide for his living despite the fact that he is not working, is displaying a tremendous amount of Gevurah!

There is another place where Chazal reference this very same pasuk from Tehillim (Bless Hashem, O His angels; the strong warriors who do His bidding, to obey the voice of His word”). In connection with the acceptance of the commandments on Mt. Sinai, when the Jews proclaimed, “We will do and we will hear” (na’aseh v’nishmah) the rabbis teach: Rav Yishmael said, “At the moment that Israel stated na’aseh prior to nishma, a Heavenly Voice came out and said to them ‘My sons, who revealed to you this secret that the ministering angels utilize, as it is written: “Bless Hashem, O His angels; the strong warriors who do His bidding, to obey the voice of His word?””

So we see that there are two places in Chazal where this pasuk of praise is used. There are two categories of people who are given this accolade: The people who keep the shemittah, and the people who said na’aseh v’nishmah by Har Sinai. Superficially, these seem to be two totally disparate, unrelated incidents. However, in actuality, mitzvas shemittah and kabalas haTorah are really two sides of the same coin. When Klal Yisrael said “na’aseh v’nishmah,” they were overcoming one of the most basic human elements: “I want to be in charge. I do not want to sign blank checks.” When Klal Yisrael said “na’aseh v’nishmah,” they, in effect, signed a blank check, because they did not know what was coming. They said, “Yes we will do whatever You ask us to do. Now, what is it that You are asking us to do?” Who does that? It takes a tremendous amount of strength of character, which goes against almost all human intuition. They did it anyway because they were giborim [strong in character].

That same inner strength is evident by those who observe shemittah. A person wants to fend for himself. He put an enormous amount of blood, sweat, and tears into his fields, orchards, and vineyards during the past six years of the agricultural cycle. Now he is expected to sit back and let the weeds grow, and allow anyone who wants, to come and take the produce, as if his property were ownerless. This also requires tremendous gevurah, tremendous strength of character.

Therefore, the Medrash says that the pasuk of “...the strong warriors who do His bidding, to obey the voice of His word” can be said about both the mekabelei haTorah — the ones who said na’aseh v’nishmah — and about the farmers who sit by and let their fields remain fallow.

This entire preface was from the Minchas Asher (Rav Asher Weiss). Now, we can appreciate the insight of Rav Zalman Sorotzkin regarding Rashi’s famous question.

“And the L-rd spoke to Moshe on Mount Sinai saying...” He is about to give the people a mitzvah they have never heard about before — the mitzvah of shemittah. You need to sit and watch everyone, including the animals, take that which grows on your land, and do nothing about it. Moshe Rabbeinu tells the nation — you are capable of doing this. Do you know why? This is the entire experience of Har Sinai over again. This is exactly what you did at the time of the Revelation. At Har Sinai, you demonstrated the strength of character to say, “We will do and we will hear.” “And the L-rd spoke to Moshe on Mount Sinai saying” telegraphs a message to the people. This is Har Sinai Round Two. You did it once — you can do it again! The Jewish people have within them the gevurah to overcome natural instincts and follow the command of Hashem, wherever it takes them.

Rav Asher Weiss references something that we have mentioned on other occasions. The Vilna Gaon (1720-1797) writes in the Even Shlomo, “Man’s main life (challenge) in this world is conquering one’s (evil) nature.”

Overcoming his natural inclination is every person’s prime spiritual task in

this world. That is why we are put on this earth. And someone who cannot correct these natural tendencies — what is his purpose in life? The very same concept is expressed as well by a famous Chassidic personality of the same era as the Gaon — the Noam Elimelech (Elimelech Weisblum of Lizhensk — 1717–1787). The Noam Elimelech writes, “Man was only created in this world to break his nature.”

This was the na’aseh v’nishmah of Har Sinai, and therein lies our ability to keep the mitzvah of shemittah which was given “...B’Har Sinai leimor.” **“If Your Brother Becomes Impoverished” — What is the Significance of the Word ‘Imach’?**

The pasuk in Parshas Behar says: “If your brother becomes impoverished and his hand falters with you (imach), you shall hold on to him (whether he is) a convert or a resident, so that he can live with you” [Vayikra 25:35]. There is a certain peculiarity in the way this pasuk is written. The pasuk would read perfectly fine without the word imach (literally ‘with you’) inserted after the words “...and his hand falters.” What is added by inserting this word?

The sefer Yismach Yehudah (by a Rabbi Yehudah Jacobowitz from Lakewood) quotes a sefer which I have never heard of, called the Shevet Mishor, by Rav Meir Leib Frye. He wants to say that the way the pasuk is worded teaches a special lesson that is most applicable in our own day and age.

The Gemara says “Poverty in a person’s home is extremely debilitating” [Bava Basra 116a]. Here too, the Torah uses a peculiar choice of words: “B’soch beiso shel adam” [in the midst of a person’s house]. What do these words mean? He writes that there are two types of poor people. There is a person whom everyone knows is poor. Therefore, when Purim or Yom Tov arrives, people help him with his various expenses. However, there is another type of poor person. This person lives in a wonderful house, and he has all the outside trappings of wealth — a nice car, a nice house, etc. But no one knows that this fellow is the victim of a sub-prime mortgage crisis. Nobody knows that he is near bankruptcy and that his entire apparent lifestyle is just a facade. There is no public collection for this person. “I should give him money? He should give me money!”

This is what the Gemara means when it phrases the statement as, “Poverty is debilitating when it is b’soch beiso shel adam” — hidden within the four walls of his house — such that no one is aware of it. The homeowner is the only person who knows he is facing financial disaster, and that the banks are about to foreclose, not only on his house but on everything he owns. The knowledge of his situation is limited to “toch beiso shel adam.” Only a few close friends know the truth. The Torah says that “when your brother becomes poor and his hand falters with you (imach)...” Everyone else does not know about it, except for those few individuals who are from his circle of friends. They are also wealthy, and they do know the situation. He has always been in their peer group, but now he is facing financial disaster. There are some situations that only a chosen few know about. In those situations, it is the chosen few who have the obligation to do something about it. In these situations, “you shall strengthen him, and your brother will live with you (imach).” You need to restore him to the way he once was. It is your responsibility to help him out in an extraordinary fashion.

When a person is — and always has been — poor, he does not expect and does not deserve extravagant support. But when a person who has always lived in comfort now faces being on the breadline, that experience is devastating. Since he has always been financially “with you,” it is your obligation to dig down into your deep pockets, so that “your brother will continue to live with you.” (v’chai achicha imach).

**A Tale of Two Ta’amei Temurah — Rambam and Sefer HaChinuch**

The end of Parshas Bechukosai contains the concept of temurah. There is an entire tractate in the Talmud devoted to these laws. Temurah is a situation where a person sanctifies an animal, designating it to be a Korban, and then he wants to change his mind. He decides that rather than offering this animal as his sacrifice, he wants to offer another animal in its stead. Even if in fact

the second animal is superior to the one he initially designated (meaning the Beis HaMikdash will wind up getting a nicer animal for the mizbayach) nevertheless it is forbidden to swap animals once the first animal has been designated as holy. If in fact one attempts to make such a swap, declaring “zeh temuras zeh” (this one will be in place of this one), the result is that both animals are now holy.

The Rambam and Sefer HaChinuch take different approaches in explaining the laws of temurah.

The Rambam writes at the end of hilchos temurah [4:13]: “Even though everything in the Torah is a chok [a law for which we do not grasp its ultimate reason], it is appropriate to analyze them (chukim) and wherever a rationale can be given, we should offer that rationale. It appears to me that both the halacha of temurah (where both the animals become holy) and the halacha that when one tries to redeem an animal that he has previously donated to the Bais Hamikdash, he must add a twenty-five percent surcharge, are cases of the Torah descending into the thoughts of man, which are motivated by his evil inclination. It is the nature of people to want to amass wealth, and to hold onto their possessions.”

This is indeed one of the great truths of life. People love money. Someone does not need to be the Rambam to advance such an idea. People are worried about their financial holdings.

The Rambam continues: “And even though he went ahead and made a donation to the Bais Hamikdash, it is possible that he has second thoughts and regrets his generosity. In retracting his previous donation, he is tempted to redeem or replace it with something of lesser value.”

Basically, we need to be afraid that the fellow — as a result of his “second thoughts” — is trying to cheat hekdesch. In a “moment of weakness,” he transferred ownership of a beautiful animal to the treasurer of the Bais Hamikdash. Then when “his senses get the better of him” he asks himself, “What in the world did I do? Does Hashem really care if it is a beautiful cow or an ugly cow? A sacrifice is a sacrifice. It is just going to be slaughtered anyhow!” The Torah is trying to pre-empt this tendency to renege on his pledge to hekdesch, so the Torah insures that any person who tries to undo his moment of generosity will pay dearly for that attempt. Even if in fact the second animal is superior to the first animal, there are no exceptions to this rule. If the Torah would allow us a “free switch” under any circumstances, there is no end to the abuse this privilege would cause. Therefore, the Torah insists, “and it will be that the original animal and its substitute will both be holy.” This is the opinion of the Rambam.

The Sefer HaChinuch takes a different approach, offering the following very interesting idea: Someone should not fool around with sacred items. He writes: “Therefore, in order to implant in our hearts fear and reverence of matters that are holy, the Torah wants us to respect holy items. Kedusha is something which we must relate to with reverence. When someone enters the Bais Hamikdash, he must fear it. Scripture therefore commands us not to tamper with the holiness of donated items.

Once an item has become sanctified, that status should remain permanently. Once an animal is holy, it should not enter our mind to switch that sanctity onto a different animal. If a person tries to make such a switch, the Torah nullifies his intent, and both animals will become sanctified. The end result of trying to remove holiness will be just the opposite — it will multiply holiness!

Rav Pam extrapolates this idea of the Sefer HaChinuch, and suggests that this idea (i.e. — that anyone trying to tamper with or destroy kedusha will find that kedusha spreads) has been the story of Jewish history. In Egypt, they wanted to destroy the Jewish people. What happened? Kedusha spread. “The more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and the more they spread.” [Shemos 1:12]. Pharaoh wanted to make the Jewish people subhuman in the eyes of the masses. What happened? At the time of the Exodus, “Also a mixed multitude (of Egyptian people) went up with them” [Shemos 12:38]. Trying to destroy the holiness of the Jewish people is doomed to failure. The Ribono shel Olam says that this is the nature of

kedusha. Try to squelch it, try to destroy it, try to get rid of it — and it spreads.

The wicked Haman attempted to destroy, eradicate, and murder all the Jews from young lad until old man. He desired to uproot kedusha. However, the nature of kedusha is that the more one tries to destroy it, the more it spreads.

“And many of the masses of the people (of Persia) converted” [Esther 8:17]. They started converting in droves. How do we explain this phenomenon? Perhaps you can argue that “Everybody wants to be with a winner; they want to get on the band wagon.” No! It was more than that. It is the nature of kedusha to expand. This is what the parsha of temurah teaches us.

Rav Pam added that many of the people who founded the State of Israel came from Socialist, Communist, and Bundist backgrounds. They made it part of their agenda to uproot the sanctity of Israel. “We will be like all the nations, O House of Israel” [Shmuel I 8:20]. What happens when one tries to do that to kedusha? It spreads. That is why the grandchildren of some of those people are the baalei teshuvah today who are learning Torah in Ponnevez and Mir and Brisk, and all the Yeshivos that are sprouting up throughout the length and breadth of Eretz Yisrael, as never before. Why?

This is just the nature of kedusha. They try to wipe it out and decimate it, but the Ribono shel Olam says that is not going to happen. “You start up with kedusha — it is going to spread.”

This is the lesson of temurah. Not only did you not accomplish what you set out to do, but instead of one animal being holy, now two animals are holy. Such is the nature of kedusha.

*Transcribed by David Twersky; Jerusalem DavidATwersky@gmail.com*

*Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman; Baltimore, MD*

*dhoffman@torah.org*

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from: torahweb@torahweb.org

to: weeklydt@torahweb.org

date: Thu, May 10, 2018 at 6:01 PM

subject: Rabbi Yakov Haber - Covenant and Kinyan

*torahweb.org*

**Rabbi Yakov Haber**

**Covenant and Kinyan**

"And Hashem spoke to Moshe at Mount Sinai saying: ... When you enter the land which I am giving you, and the land shall rest a Sabbath for Hashem" (VaYikra 25:1-2).

Since at this point the mishkan already was standing and Hashem was communicating with Moshe Rabbeinu from the mishkan itself (VaYikra 1:1), no longer on Har Sinai - combined with the fact that none of the other multiple commandments from the beginning of Chumash VaYikra until this point were stated as being at Har Sinai - the commentaries ask why Sinai is mentioned at this point. (See Rashi, Ibn Ezra, Seforno, and Ramban among others.)

Ibn Ezra, utilizing the principle of ein mukdam umeuchar baTorah - the Torah does not always follow a chronological order, offers a unique, complex explanation as to why Har Sinai is mentioned here. He writes that the commandment of shemitta was actually given (both from Hashem to Moshe and from Moshe to Bnei Yisrael) much earlier at Har Sinai before the mishkan was built. Why then was it placed here? He explains that the Torah was given to the Jewish people as a bris, a covenant, as described in parshas Mishpatim at which time Moshe read the Seifer HaBris, the Book of the Covenant, to Am Yisrael, an altar was built and sacrifices were offered. In addition, the blood of the korbanos, referred to as "dam habris", was sprinkled on the people by Moshe Rabbeinu (Shemos 24:6-8). This covenant actually included the blessings and curses of parshas Bechukosai which are frequently called a bris (VaYikra 26:9,15,25,44,45. Also see Ibn Ezra to 26:25.) However, the Torah delayed their recording to this point instead of



placing them earlier on when the bris of Har Sinai was described. Once again, why the delay? Ibn Ezra answers that concerning the prohibition of arayos, forbidden relations, listed in parshiyos Acharei-Mos and Kedoshim, given after Har Sinai, the Torah states that this is "mitena"ai ha"aretz", among the stipulations necessary to keep in order to stay in Eretz Yisrael; if the Jewish people violate arayos, the land will "vomit them out" (18:28, 20:22). Shemitta is also mentioned in the tocheicha as being "mitena"ai ha"aretz", violation of which can lead to exile (26:34:43, Avos 5:9). In order to juxtapose the two sets of commandments whose observance allows for continued stay in the land, and whose violation leads to the opposite, chas v"shalom, the Torah records the elaboration of the laws of shemitta after the commandments concerning arayos and not next to the description of the events of Har Sinai where they were actually commanded.

Ramban accepts Ibn Ezra's premise that there is a linkage between observance of the laws against forbidden arayos and the mitzvah of shemitta as conditions to hold onto Eretz Yisrael, but disputes his application of ein mukdam umeuchar baTorah. Ramban boldly asserts that the original bris of Sinai, as a result of the sin of the Golden Calf was seemingly nullified. (See below that he strongly implies that it was not actually eliminated but was treated by Hashem, to some extent, as if it were so.) As a result, a new treaty was forged between Hashem Yisborach and the Jewish people. It was this new bris which forms the content of the alos and kelalos of parshas Bechukosai. Since the original covenant had been, to some extent, violated, Hashem insisted on strengthening the force of the bris with threats of exile and other suffering if its content were to be violated by Bnei Yisrael again. This concept of a new bris is directly referenced after the cheit ha"eigel in parshas Ki Sisa: "Behold I am forging a bris; before your nation I shall perform wonders..." (Shemos 34:10). Its content was revealed to Moshe at Sinai and was related to the Jewish people in our parshiyos of Behar and Bechukosai. Shemitta had been one of the original mitzvos that was a prominent component of the bris as recorded in parshas Mishpatim (23:10-11). It became an even more prominent part of the new covenant with more detailed elaboration of its laws. The mention of "Behar Sinai" with regard to shemitta in our parsha, according to Ramban, refers to the commandment that G-d told Moshe in conjunction with the giving of the second luchos after the cheit ha"eigel as part of the process of the renewal of the covenant. It was only taught to the Jewish people at this point.

What emerges then from the pesukim as elaborated upon by these commentaries is that the Nosein haTorah did not just command us in a set of mitzvos but insisted that we enter into a mutual treaty with Him. The famous statement of "na"aseh v"nishma" (Shemos 24:7) represented the Jewish people's acceptance of the original covenant of Sinai. The phenomenon of a "national convention" leading to a covenant with G-d repeats itself throughout Jewish history. Earlier, the founding father of the Jewish nation, Avraham Avinu, entered into two brisos with Hashem, the Bris bein HaBesarim (Bereishis 15) and the bris mila (ibid. 17). In addition to the two Sinaitic ones mentioned by Ramban, a third covenant was established with the Jewish people at arvos Moav (Devarim 28:69, 29:9 ff.). (See the commentaries including Ramban and Abarbanel (ad loc.) as to the need for an additional bris at that point.) In the days of Mordechai and Esther, our Sages teach us that the Jews then reaffirmed their commitment to the bris. On the verse "kiyemu vekibelu hayehudim" (Esther 9:27), Rava states (Shabbos 88a): "they reaccepted [the Torah] in the days of Achashveirosh; they reaffirmed that which they had already accepted." Mori v"Rabi Rav Hershel Schachter shlita quoted a Geonic version of the Gemara (Pesachim 68b) that the meal on Purim celebrates this renewed kabbalas haTorah. In the days of Ezra and Nechemia, the Jewish people, after separating from their gentile wives and non-Jewish children and committing to full observance of Shabbos, committed to and even signed the "bris amana - the covenant of loyalty" (Nechemia 9,10). So too in the period of the final redemption, in the era of Messianic perfection, Hashem promises to form a new covenant, a "bris chadasha", with the Jewish people, reaffirming for all eternity the

covenant of Sinai which will never again be abrogated (Yirmiyahu 31:30-33).

Ezra HaSofer ordained that the two tochaichos of Bechukosai and Ki Savo be read before Shavuos and Rosh HaShana, respectively (Megilla 31b). On a simple plane, they warn us of the dire consequences of abandoning the source of life itself, the Torah and its mitzvos, before the day of the giving of the Torah and before the day of Judgment, respectively. But this takkana also highlights the historical entry into a bris with HaKadosh Baruch Hu and the need to renew our commitment to that covenant. Rav Y. D. Solovetichik zt"l (Yemei Zikaron) highlighted the emphasis on bris in the musaf prayer of Rosh HaShana. Almost all the pesukim quoted in the blessing of zichronos refer to bris, and the blessing ends with the phrase "zocher habris". Shavuos, the day of both Matan Torah and Kabbalas HaTorah stresses this same theme.

The concept of tochaicha, intertwined with the bris of Sinai, brings to mind frightening images of Divine wrath and punishment, exile and suffering, unmentionable tragedy and pain. The custom is to read this portion in a low voice indicating our fervent wish not to have to undergo its prophecy of doom. But the giving of the Torah on Shavuos is midrashically compared to a marriage between HaKadosh Baruch Hu, the chassan, and Knesses Yisrael, the kalla (see Ta"anis 4:8, Rashi to Shemos 34:1). Many of the customs of a Jewish wedding are derived from Har Sinai: the chuppaparallel to the mountain over us, marching down to the chuppa with fire reminiscent of the lightning of Sinai, and the giving of a ring parallel to the giving of the luchos. Maharsha (Kesuvos 7b) even writes that the ending of the blessing of eirusin, "m"kadeish amo Yisrael al yedei chuppa vekiddushin" can be translated as "Hashem married the Jewish people through chuppa and kiddushin" (the luchos and Har Sinai)! How can the imagery of the happiness of a marriage be reconciled with the fright of tochaicha.

A fundamental insight I heard from Rav Michael Rosensweig shlita[1] can perhaps resolve this seeming contradiction. Non-Jewish marriage (from a Jewish law perspective) is a "common-law" marriage. A couple decides to live together as husband and wife. Divorce is accomplished by either spouse initiating a separation. (See Rambam, Ishus 1:2, Melachim 9:8.) Jewish marriage, by contrast, is based upon kinyan: "Ha"Ishta nikneis bishlosa d"rachim - a woman enters into the marriage kinyan via one of three methods" (Kiddushin 1:1). In the language of Rambam (Ishus ibid.) "once the Torah was given, Israel was commanded that if a man wishes to marry a woman, he should first be koneh her in the presence of witnesses and only then will she be his wife..." This concept of kinyan in marriage has often been misunderstood. Any seasoned student of the Talmud immediately recognizes that a woman is not "acquired" by her husband as property. What then is the "kinyan" of marriage?[2] A Jewish marriage is characterized by the commitment that marriage entails. Unlike non-Jewish marriage which is formed without kinyan, or without commitment, which can be broken at will, Jewish marriage requires this commitment and is not so easily broken. The fact that the punishment for adultery is so severe is indicative of how intense the bond between husband and wife really is. This, in turn, is reflective on a microcosmic level of the macrocosmic "marriage" between HaKadosh Baruch Hu and the Jewish people. It is premised upon mutual commitment and not flippant, ephemeral, spur of the moment will or desire alone. The disastrous consequences predicted by the Torah for abandoning its precepts are reflective of how serious and everlasting this fundamentally loving relationship is. Ramban earlier carefully states that even after the cheit ha"Eigel "ke"ilu nisbatela habris - it was as if the covenant had been nullified"; in reality, it was never nullified as it is eternal. This is why, explains Ramban, no korbanos or sprinkling of the dam bris on the nation was necessary for the second bris since it was merely a reaffirmation of the first. I heard from Rav Schachter shlita in the name of Rav Nachman miBreslov that one meaning of the breaking of a glass under the chuppa is to represent the breaking of the luchos rishonos; even after they were broken, the covenant continued with the luchos sheniyois!



The urgency of Torah and mitzvos as reflected by the tochaicha is indicative of the intense, eternal connection of the Creator of the World and his beloved nation. The eternal bris and its fundamental nature is expressed so poignantly by Yirmiyahu (33:25) "im lo brisi yomam valayla, chukos shamayim va"aretz lo samti - if not for my eternal covenant, I would not have formed the laws of heaven and earth!" Chazal explain this bris to be alternatively Torah (Pesachim 68b) or Avoda (Megilla 31b). The upcoming holiday of Shavuot highlights the first. The celebration of Yom Yerushalayim before Shavuot commemorates, in a sense, the second meaning of bris. Not only do we celebrate the great miraculous salvation Hashem orchestrated for his people during and after the Six-Day War but the reconquest of the ancient Yerushalayim and the Har HaBayis which, G-d willing, will be the first step in the eventual road to the re-establishment of the Beis HaMikdash and the service of Hashem there bimheira beyameinu!

[1] Introductory shiurim to Kiddushin and Kesuvos on yutorah.org. The presentation is as I understood his words. Any error in formulation is my own.

[2] Much has been written as to its precise nature in Rishonim and Acharonim. Here, we focus on its hashkafic implications as I understood from Rav Rosensweig's shlita shiurim.  
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From: Naaleh Torah Online <contact@naaleh.com>

Date: Thu, May 10, 2018 at 1:37 PM

Subject: Parsha Behar & Bechukotai:

**Shabbat Scenarios: Fit To Be Tied**

**More Applications of the Melacha of Koshair #3**

**Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Shimon Isaacson**

Can you tie a knot on a Torah belt (gelilah) on Shabbat?

Today most shuls have clips or pre-tied belts, but the question may still come up. On Shabbat morning the knot is by definition temporary, as the Torah will be taken out again later in the day during Mincha. However, after Mincha the Torah will not be read again until Monday morning, thirty six hours later. According to the Rambam and the Rif it is still considered an ordinary temporary knot and it is permitted. According to Rashi, it is a quasi-permanent knot. There is a machloket if a quasi-permanent knot is a knot that is meant to last for more than a day or more than seven days. Therefore, the Mishna Berura advises against tying a knot meant to stay more than a day. However, in cases of need, there is room for leniency.

The Shulchan Aruch writes, based on the Rambam and the Rif, that tying a temporary knot for a mitzva is permitted. However, if the Torah will not be used again for more than six months, one should not tie such a knot on Shabbat.

Adjusting a necktie

Making a Half Windsor slip knot in a tie is permitted. A Double Windsor knot could pose a problem as it is considered a more professional type of knot. There may be room for leniency based on a comment of Sharei Teshuva that discusses belts. A double knot on a raincoat belt is permitted because it is a loose, ordinary, temporary knot that is undone regularly. Both a belt and a tie are made of thick material which is usually tied loosely. However, tying a tight double knot on a women's thin dress belt should be avoided.

Is it permitted to make a tight double knot on Shabbat with the intent to untie it that day?

Can you tie tzizit knots on Shabbat with the intent to untie it immediately after Shabbat? According to the Pri Megadim, it is permitted as the knot is temporary. However, the Mishna Berura disagrees. Normally, people do not undo tzizit or tefillin knots. If the nature of the knot is permanent, then an individual's intent cannot nullify the intent of the masses. Therefore, such permanent kinds of knots should not be made on Shabbat even if they will be untied that day.

Twist-ties

The Rambam writes that twisting twine together to make a thick rope is a derivative (tolda) of Koshair and is Biblically prohibited. Are twist-ties analogous to this? Rav Auerbach and Rav Elyashiv rule that it is prohibited, certainly if one does not intend to untie it. Other poskim disagree and permit it. In general one should avoid using twist-ties on Shabbat. However twisting the tie once is permitted.

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fw from hamelaket@gmail.com

from: Torah in Action /Shema Yisrael <parsha@torahinaction.com>

subject: Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum

**Shema Yisrael Torah Network**

**Peninim on the Torah - Parsha Behar-Bechukosai**

**פרשת בהר - בחקותי תשלח**

**אל תונו איש את אחיו**

**Do not aggrieve one another. (25:14)**

The Torah details the prohibition against cheating a fellow Jew in business by overcharging. One should seek every avenue to help a fellow Jew – not to cheat him. What kind of person cheats his brother? This probably sounds like a naïve question. Obviously, one who has fallen so financially in arrears that his only way out is to take advantage of others who are unaware. What about *bitachon*, trust in Hashem? *Horav Yitzchak Yaakov Ruderman, zl*, explains that the answer is in the juxtaposition of the laws of *onaah*, cheating, upon the previous stated laws of *shemittah*, the seventh year rest period for the land.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* explains that *emunah*, faith in Hashem, is a prerequisite for carrying out the *mitzvah* of *shemittah*. Otherwise, how can a person just sit idly by and not plant his field? What will he eat? How will he feed his family? The Torah tells us not to worry. Hashem will bless the crops of the sixth year, so that it will suffice for the next two years. Likewise, one who cheats his fellow demonstrates by his actions that he has no faith in Hashem; therefore, he must cheat and steal.

The *Chovos HaLevavos (hakdamah, preface, to Shaar Ha'Bitachon)* explains that the *middah*, character trait, of *bitachon* leads one to *menuchas ha'nefesh*, peace of mind. The mind of one who does not have *bitachon* cannot possibly function properly. Furthermore, one cannot learn Torah. If the intellect is not free of worry then the Torah has no place to enter. The person thus denies himself the opportunity for spiritual growth. A mind that is constantly preoccupied with “deals,” that is busy calculating every possible avenue for “making a buck,” does not have much faith and trust in Hashem. Furthermore, as explained by *Horav Yisrael Belsky, zl*, one who lacks faith and trust is incapable of forming deep and genuine relationships with others. He views every agreement as something one makes for the sake of convenience, and he is always on guard against changes, which will indicate a parting of the ways from partners involved in previous deeds.

A person who realizes that his *parnassah*, livelihood, is decreed from Heaven Above lives a serene life. It will either come, or it will not. There is nothing he can do about it but pray. One who lies and cheats in order to “supplement” his earning is a *kofer*, denier of Hashem. It is as simple as that. *Horav Yechiel Michel Gordon, zl, (Rosh Yeshivas Lomza)* was wont to say, “For whom shall I have greater compassion: the thief or his victim? I would say the thief. For the victim is dealing with a Heavenly edict (that he now lose his money). The edict will change and, next time, Hashem will decree that he have money. His situation is temporary, and there is nothing that he could have done to alter it. The thief, however, is in serious shape. If this money is not his (by decree), then he has gained nothing by stealing, since the money he has in his possession is not “rightfully” (Heavenly mandated) his. If, on the other hand, the money is “his,” then he would have rightfully received it through another appropriate Heavenly channel. By stealing money which Hashem would have given him anyway, he is acquiring *Gehinnom*, punishment in Purgatory, for himself for no “reason” (rather for

no gain, since the money that he stole would have eventually made it into his possession through kosher means.)”

Our *gedolim*, Torah giants, who understood the meaning of *bitachon* in Hashem lived joyously, despite not knowing from whence the next dollar/*shekel* would come. They were acutely aware – and totally believed – that Hashem would provide for their needs. In fact, any infringement on this relationship with the Almighty caused them angst. They were serene and calm, knowing that He was taking care of everything.

The *Brisker Rav*, *zl*, had a *kollel* in Yerushalayim in which he learned with some of the city’s greatest scholars. The future *Roshei Yeshivah* were primarily students of his. Every *erev Rosh Chodesh*, he gave each member of the *kollel* a stipend. If the money was readily available, he paid without problem. If he did not have it, he borrowed it, and later, when he raised the money, he paid it back. There was no such thing as not paying on time. He saw to it that his scholars received their stipend in a timely fashion.

One *erev Rosh Chodesh*, he had no money; neither did he have anyone from whom to borrow. It was a dire situation. One of his students remarked, “Would it not be wonderful if a wealthy Jew from London would visit and give the *Rosh Yeshivah* a check for \$5000 that would cover expenses for next six months? The *Rosh Yeshivah* would have no financial worries and could learn stress-free.”

The *Brisker Rav* replied that, had this occurred, he would not have taken the money from the philanthropist: “I am not selling my *bitachon* in Hashem for \$5000. Every *erev Rosh Chodesh*, I have the ‘opportunity’ to turn to Hashem in prayer, asking Him to alleviate my concerns, to help me cover my budget. If I would have the money, I would have no reason to pray for budgetary concerns. I would not give that up!”

The legendary *Mashgiach* of Mir and Ponevez, *Horav Yechezkel Levenstein, zl*, was a serious person. His mind was always either engrossed in learning or preoccupied with Heavenly matters. His *yiraas Shomayim*, fear of Heaven, was always noticeable and manifest on his countenance. Smiling and joviality were not expressions one expected to see on his face. Thus, it startled *Horav Sholom Schwadron, zl*, when he visited *Rav Chatzkel* (as he was referred to lovingly) to see the *Mashgiach* with a broad smile on his face.

Seeing the startled look on *Rav Sholom*’s face, the *Mashgiach* took him by the hand and said, “Shortly after I married, life was difficult from an economic standpoint. We had no money; the cupboard was bare. I accepted a position from which I earned a monthly stipend. This provided us with funds, but I was spiritually miserable. Having money on a regular basis caused me to diminish my closeness with Hashem. Then war broke out. What a blessing! No more position; no more money. I lived together with Hashem. I felt His Presence in my life. The war ended, and I once again became a *mashgiach* with a regular salary. This cast a pall over my relationship with Hashem. Now, *Baruch Hashem*, it has been eight months since the *Ponevezer Rav* told me that he has no money to pay salaries. I am back with Hashem! Is there any greater sweetness than that? How could I not smile!”

לא תעבד בו עבדת עבד

**You shall not work with him slave labor. (25:39)**

The *eved Ivri*, Jewish bondsman/slave, is not a slave in the generally accepted sense of the word. He is an indentured servant, who, for a specific period of time, neither is free to do as he wants, nor to resign his employment. Nonetheless, their masters must treat them with such delicacy and consideration that *Chazal* (*Kiddushin* 20a) say, “One who purchases a (Jewish) slave for himself buys himself a master.” The master is forbidden to assign him to perform degrading work that would be relegated only to a slave. He is to be assigned skilled, dignified labor like hired help.

The *Sefer HaChinuch* writes: “Consequently, it is for a man to give thought to which labor he may order his *eved Ivri* to do...At the root of the precept lies the goal that a man should reflect in his heart that our nation is the most honorable of all, and, as a result, he will love his nation and his Torah...”

There is a further benefit in the matter. [As a result of reflecting on the laws of *eved Ivri*] a man will train his spirit in the quality of *chesed*, lovingkindness and compassion and will (in turn) distance himself from the evil quality of cruelty. As he prepares his spirit for goodness, he will (commensurately) receive good reward, and Hashem delights in bestowing his blessings on His human beings.”

Observing the laws of *eved Ivri* means, according to the *Sefer HaChinuch*, that (obviously) one treats his servant with respect and dignity. Furthermore, he should reflect on the *mitzvah* and its message, because it teaches us a powerful lesson. It trains us in the *middah*, character trait, of *chesed*, lovingkindness. The *Chinuch* teaches that one must work on acquiring the *middah* of *chesed*, train himself in its nuances and distance himself from any form of cruelty. The result will be reward, because Hashem wants to perform kindness with he who is kind to others. The following two stories are unique *chesed* stories. The first story underscores the reward one receives for *chesed*; the second story demonstrates the extreme thoughtfulness evinced by a rare individual who performed *chesed* even after his own passing.

The first story was revealed at the funeral of *Rav Avraham Steiner, zl*, who left this world at the age of ninety-six, after witnessing and experiencing *nachas*, spiritual satisfaction, from three generations of descendants. (This is recorded by *Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita*, in his *Mitzvos B’simchah*.) When *Rav Steiner* was queried concerning what in his mind catalyzed the *z’chus* for his extraordinary longevity and *nachas*, he related the following story.

The commandant at the concentration camp where he was interned was an especially cruel fiend, even by Nazi standards. The man did not possess an iota of compassion or human decency. He walked through the camp in constant anger, with the brutal death of a Jew being the only thing that would bring a smile to his miserable face. Every day, during “roll call,” he would call out three or four names. This meant that these hapless Jews were to go to a private room to the side of the block, where they would be mercilessly tortured by the commandant. The screams were heard throughout the block. They did not last long before the *kedoshim*, martyrs, expired amid extreme, excruciating pain - to the glee and satisfaction of this human form of *Satan*.

Any Jew whose name was called out was well aware of what was in store for him. He knew that he was just moments away from terrible pain and death. The daily roll call was a mind-numbing, tension-filled experience for all the inmates. I write this just to present the emotional backdrop for what is about to happen. One day, the commandant called out the name of a Jew by the name of Steinmetz. Out of extreme fear, *Reb Steinmetz* became temporarily mute. The Nazi called his name two more times, with no response. Steinmetz was unable to extract an audible sound from his throat. The rage within the commandant began to boil over. The bile within him rose, as he began to walk through the line looking for the elusive Steinmetz, who dared to ignore his call. As he neared Steinmetz’s place in the line, one of the guards erred and pointed to Steiner instead of Steinmetz.

R’ Avraham Steiner realized what was happening and what was obviously about to happen to him as a result of the guard’s error. Nonetheless, this holy man decided on the spot to perform the ultimate act of *chesed*. He left the line and walked with the three other unfortunates whose names had been called to the commandant’s little torture room. He realized that as a result of his act of *chesed*, he was probably taking his last earthly walk.

The four just stood there waiting nervously for the beatings, the torture, the pain and, finally, death. Nothing happened. They continued to wait. Suddenly, they heard the sound of machine - gun fire coming from the place where they had just been standing. The gun shots were accompanied by terror-stricken screams coming from the inmates in line who were now being mercilessly mowed down by the accursed Nazi guards. Apparently, the Nazi fiend commandant decided to alter his daily practice: instead of murdering four prisoners, he decided to save the four and murder everyone else. R’ Avraham Steiner’s life was spared due to an act of *chesed*. [*Rav Zilberstein* discusses the *halachic* aspects of R’ Steiner’s decision to relinquish his life

for another Jew: Was it *halachically* mandated or *middas chassidus*, an act of piety which went beyond the call of duty.]

The second story concerns *Horav Shraga Grossbard, zl*, who, during his lifetime, had purchased a burial plot on *Ha HaZeisim*, Mount Olives. When asked why he did this (knowing the danger of visiting that area of Yerushalayim), he replied that his uncle, *Horav Abba Grossbard, zl*, who died childless, was buried there. He figured that when his own children would visit his grave, they would walk over to that of his uncle and pray for his *neshamah*. This was an incredible act of posthumous *chesed*, since it compelled his own children to make a special, somewhat difficult and often dangerous, trek to his grave, all because he was thinking of his late uncle. This was clearly not your ordinary act of *chesed*.

*Rav Shraga* was *niftar*, passed away, during the height of the Arab Intifada, when tensions were elevated and the danger level rose exceedingly high. It was almost impossible to undertake a funeral on *Har HaZeisim* safely. In a quandary, the family turned to *Horav Elazar M. Shach, zl*, to decide between carrying out the will of the deceased and acceding to fears for their own safety. *Rav Shach* listened carefully to their query and replied that *Rav Shraga* should be buried on *Har HaZeisim*.

#### **Bechukosai**

**ואף גם זאת בהיותם בארץ אויביהם לא מאסתי ולא געלתים לכלתם**

***But despite all this, while they will be in the land of their enemies, I will not have been revolted by them nor will I have rejected them to obliterate them. (26:44)***

In the closing words of the *Tochachah*, Rebuke, Hashem consoles His tormented Nation. They might be in exile, but it is not the end. The atrocities that have accompanied them throughout the exile, the travail that has been their constant shadow, does not mean that Hashem has rejected them. No, says Hashem. Even in exile they remain His People, and the Covenant He made with them remains in full force.

*Parashas Bechukosai* contains within it the first set of *kelalos*, curses, which comprise the Rebuke. The second set, which is larger, is in *Parashas Ki Savo*. The distinctions between the two Rebukes extend beyond their difference in size. One commonality between the two is the manner in which they are read by the *baal korei*, Torah reader, in *shul* on *Shabbos*. *Halachah* states that they are to be read quickly and in a low voice. During the time of the *Chafetz Chaim*, some individual Jews would exit the *shul*, almost run out, during the reading of the Rebuke. It was almost as if they did not want to hear the many curses. Clearly, this was not an intelligent way to act, but simple people think that what they do not hear cannot hurt them.

The *Chafetz Chaim* responded to these people with a parable. A Jew was compelled to go on the road for the purpose of seeking a livelihood. The journey involved traveling on old, decrepit roads filled with ditches, deep potholes and rocks. He feared the worst. One bad move, and his horse and wagon would be history, with himself to follow shortly thereafter. In an attempt to assuage his fears, his wife suggested that he wear a blindfold when he rode through the troubled area. He looked at her incredulously and said, “At least, if I keep my eyes open and look where I am going, I might avoid some of the dangerous holes. With my eyes closed, the danger is magnified exponentially.” The lesson is obvious: If one listens intently to the curses, he increases the chance that he will not sin, thereby avoiding the punishment. If he ignores the warnings, his chances for success diminish considerably.

The *Tochachah* of our *parshah* closes with words of consolation and hope. Not so, the later *Tochachah* of *Parashas Ki Savo*. A number of explanations are offered for this. The *Ponevezzer Rav, zl*, explains that the early *Tochachah* of our *parshah* addresses the collective nation. It is thus written in *lashon rabim*, the plural. The *Tochachah* of *Sefer Devarim* is speaking to each individual Jew. Thus, it is written in *lashon yachid*, the singular. The *havtachah*, promise, that “in the end all will be good,” applies to the collective nation, a guarantee that cannot be made to each and every individual Jew.

The *Radbaz* distinguishes between the two Rebukes, in that the Rebuke of *Sefer Devarim* includes Hashem’s Name (as the One Who is sending the curses) in most of the *kelalos*, while in *Sefer Vayikra*, the people view the curses as happenstance. Such a curse, whereby the victims/*Klal Yisrael* do not realize the Source of their travail, requires a special consolation. Knowing that our loving Father is behind each curse is in and of itself a tremendous source of comfort.

In closing, *Horav Reuven Karlinstein, zl*, quotes the *pasuk* in *Yeshayah* 54:7, that refers to the many troubles and vicissitudes that have been our lot during our long and difficult exile. *B’rega katton azavtich u’v’rachamim gedolim akabtzteich*: “For but a brief moment have I forsaken you and with abundant mercy I will gather you in.” The *Navi*, Prophet, *Yeshayah*, refers to all of our travail, the exiles, inquisitions, pogroms, holocaust – every drop of Jewish blood that has been spilled throughout our long and tumultuous history – as a *rega katton*, brief moment. Everything that has occurred in our history, all of the suffering and persecution, is the result of a “brief moment” when we were forsaken. We hope and anticipate every day, every moment, that the *rachamim gedolim*, “abundant mercy” will soon arrive, so that we will be so overwhelmed by the good that we will truly view the pain as having lasted but a “brief moment.”

**איש כי יפלא נדר בערכך נפשת לד'**

***If a man articulates a vow to Hashem regarding a valuation of human beings. (27:2)***

Just as people may vow to contribute specific values of money to the *Bais Hamikdash*, so, too, may one vow to contribute the value of oneself or of another person. The word *erech* means valuation. Thus, one who contributes the *erech*, value, of a person, follows the Torah’s guidelines concerning valuation. The Torah values people according to age and gender. The value of a Jew is measured in spiritual sanctity which we, as human beings, are unable to evaluate. Thus, the Torah gives specific guidelines with regard to equal values of Jews.

Noticeably, the *parsha* of *arachin*, evaluations, follows immediately after the Rebuke, which details the many curses that will accompany the Jewish people in the event their faith and trust in Hashem wanes, leading them to eventual apostasy. Is there a connection between the laws of *arachin* and the *Tochachah*? *Horav David Jungreis, zl*, *Av Bais Din* in Yerushalayim, gave the following practical insight.

The laws of evaluations apply only to a Jew. When a gentile desires to donate his personal value to the *Bais Hamikdash*, we will take his contribution, but not on the same value scale as a Jew. In other words, the value system which applies to Jews applies only to Jews. A gentile’s value is commensurate with his personal, individual worth. If he is big and strong, or if he is a powerful person, obviously his value will be commensurate to his worth. If he is a wimp, likewise will be his value. A Jew’s value is static, as prescribed by the Torah. Why is this? Should not a Jew who has been through a number of physical and emotional challenges have diminished value? Should not a Jew who is physically inept, weak, physically challenged, draw a lower price on the evaluation market?

No, explains *Rav Jungreis*. Regardless of a Jew’s physical appearance or prowess, even if he could not fetch a decent price on the market of human value, the mere fact that he is a Jew grants him equal value with any other Jew. Why is this? Should a person who has been physically traumatized – and looks it -- have the same value as one who is a “perfect” specimen of humanity? Yes, because when a Jew experiences travail it does not diminish him. On the contrary, it purifies his soul and elevates it to a higher, more sublime status. We grow from our pain. Our troubles elevate us. A Jew does not declare, “What am I worth now that I have suffered so much?” Even if a Jew were to experience (*chas v’shalom*, Heaven forbid) every curse in the Rebuke, it will not lower his value one iota!

The *parsha* of *arachin* is meant to console us, to hearten us with the knowledge that a Jew’s value does not decrease despite his suffering. Those

of us who have merited to meet and know survivors of the European Holocaust can attest to this verity. A Jew does not decrease in value.

#### ***Va'ani Tefillah***

**השיבה שופטינו כבראשונה – Hashivah shofteinu k'varishonah – Restore our justices as before.**

We have suffered in exile for almost two millennia. The *Gaon, zl, m'Vilna* explains that much of our suffering in exile may be attributed to three factors. The first factor is corrupt leadership and judges. The second factor is the negative influence we receive as the result of living in environments that are not spiritually conducive. This is especially true when we are harassed by the people around us who cannot tolerate: our being different; our desire to maintain a lifestyle and culture that is in tune with our Torah, but does not coincide with a society whose morals are profligate, that are devoid of integrity, and a value system that is at odds with spirituality. The third factor is our personal *yetzer hora*, evil inclination, that gravitates to and encourages us to act wrongly. The *brachah* of *Hashivah shofteinu* addresses all three factors, beginning with our plea for the restoration of justice. (to be continued)

*In honor of Dr. Dennis and Marriane Glazer  
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prepared and edited by Rabbi L. Scheinbaum*

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fw from hamelaket@gmail.com  
from: Ohr Torah Stone <ohrtorahstone@otsny.org>  
reply-to: yishai@ots.org.il  
subject: Rabbi Riskin on the Weekly Torah Portion

#### **Parshat Behar-Behukotai (Leviticus 25:1-27:34) Rabbi Shlomo Riskin**

Efrat, Israel – “The 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 re-generation 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 “in-corporeal-ized”, 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.

Shabbat Shalom

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