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Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

In Bechukotai, in the midst of one of the most searing curses ever to have been uttered to a nation by way of warning, the sages found a fleck of pure gold.

Moses is describing a nation in flight from its enemies: "I will bring despair into the hearts of those of you who survive in enemy territory. Just the sound of a windblown leaf will put them to running, and they will run scared as if running from a sword! They will fall even when no one is chasing them! They will stumble over each other as they would before a sword, even though no one is chasing them! You will have no power to stand before your enemies." (Lev. 26:36-37)

There is on the face of it nothing positive in this nightmare scenario. But the sages said: "They will stumble over each other" -- read this as "stumble because of one another": this teaches that all Israelites are sureties [i.e. responsible] for one another." (Sifra ad loc., Sanhedrin 27b, Shavuot 39a)

This is an exceedingly strange passage. Why locate this principle here? Surely the whole Torah testifies to it. When Moses speaks about the reward for keeping the covenant he does so collectively. There will be rain in its due season. You will have good harvests. And so on. The principle that Jews have collective responsibility, that their fate and destiny are interlinked: this could have been found in the Torah's blessings. Why search for it among its curses?

The answer is that there is nothing unique to Judaism in the idea that we are all implicated in one another's fate. That is true of the citizens of any nation. If the economy is booming, most people benefit. If there is a recession many people suffer. If a neighbourhood is scarred by crime, people are scared to walk the streets. If there is law and order, if people are polite to one another and come to one another's aid, there is a general sense of well-being. We are social animals, and our horizons of possibility are shaped by the society and culture within which we live.

All of this applied to the Israelites so long as they were a nation in their own land. But what when they suffered defeat and exile and were eventually scattered across the earth? They no longer had any of the conventional lineaments of a nation. They were not living in the same place. They did not share the same language of everyday life. While Rashi and his family were living in Christian northern Europe and speaking French, Maimonides was living in Muslim Egypt, speaking and writing Arabic.

Nor did Jews share a fate. While those in northern Europe were suffering persecution and massacres during the Crusades, the Jews of Spain were enjoying their golden age. While the Jews of Spain were being expelled and compelled to wander round the world as refugees, the Jews of Poland were enjoying a rare sunlit moment of tolerance. In what sense therefore were they responsible for one another? What constituted them as a nation? How -- as the author of Psalm 137 put it -- could they sing G-d's song in a strange land?

There are only two texts in the Torah that speak to this situation, namely the two sections of curses, one in our parsha, and the other in Deuteronomy in the parsha of Ki Tavo. Only these speak about a time when Israel is exiled and dispersed, scattered, as Moses later put it, "to the most distant lands under heaven." There are three major differences between the two curses, however. The passage in Leviticus is in the plural, that in Deuteronomy in the singular. The curses in Leviticus are the words of G-d; in Deuteronomy they are the words of Moses. And the curses in Deuteronomy do not end in hope. They conclude in a vision of unrelieved bleakness: "You will try to sell yourselves as slaves -- both male and female -- but no one will want to buy you." (Deut. 28:68)

Those in Leviticus end with a momentous hope: "But despite all that, when they are in enemy territory, I will not reject them or despise them to the point of totally destroying them, breaking my covenant with them by doing so, because I am the Lord their G-d. But for their sake I will remember the covenant with the first generation, the ones I brought out of Egypt's land in the sight of all the nations, in order to be their G-d; I am the Lord." (Lev. 26:44-45)

Even in their worst hours, according to Leviticus, the Jewish people would never be destroyed. Nor would G-d reject them. The covenant would still be in force and its terms still operative. That meant that Jews would still be linked to one another by the same ties of mutual responsibility that they had in the land -- for it was the covenant that formed them as a nation and bound them to one another even as it bound them to G-d. Therefore, even when falling over one another in flight from their enemies they would still be bound by

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mutual responsibility. They would still be a nation with a shared fate and destiny.

This is a rare and special idea, and it is the distinctive feature of the politics of covenant. Covenant became a major element in the politics of the West following the Reformation. It shaped political discourse in Switzerland, Holland, Scotland and England in the seventeenth century as the invention of printing and the spread of literacy made people familiar for the first time with the Hebrew Bible (the "Old Testament" as they called it). There they learned that tyrants are to be resisted, that immoral orders should not be obeyed, and that kings did not rule by divine right but only by the consent of the governed.

The same convictions were held by the Pilgrim Fathers as they set sail for America, but with this difference, that they did not disappear over time as they did in Europe. The result is that the United States is the only country today whose political discourse is framed by the idea of covenant.

Two textbook examples of this are Lyndon Baines Johnson's Inaugural of 1965, and Barack Obama's Second Inaugural of 2013. Both use the biblical device of significant repetition (always an odd number, three or five or seven). Johnson invokes the idea of covenant five times. Obama five times begins paragraphs with a key phrase of covenant politics -- words never used by British politicians -- namely, "We the people."

In covenant societies it is the people as a whole who are responsible, under G-d, for the fate of the nation. As Johnson put it, "Our fate as a nation and our future as a people rest not upon one citizen but upon all citizens." In Obama's words, "You and I, as citizens, have the power to set this country's course." That is the essence of covenant: we are all in this together. There is no division of the nation into rulers and ruled. We are conjointly responsible, under the sovereignty of G-d, for one another.

This is not open-ended responsibility. There is nothing in Judaism like the tendentious and ultimately meaningless idea set out by Jean-Paul Sartre in Being and Nothingness of 'absolute responsibility': The essential consequence of our earlier remarks is that man, being condemned to be free, carries the weight of the whole world on his shoulders, he is responsible for the world and for himself as a way of being. (Jean-Paul Sartre, Being and Nothingness, trans. Hazel Barnes, Ne w York, Washington Square Press, 1966, 707)

In Judaism we are responsible only for what we could have prevented but did not. This is how the Talmud puts it: Whoever can forbid his household [to commit a sin] but does not, is seized for [the sins of] his household. [If he can forbid] his fellow citizens [but does not] he is seized for [the sins of] his fellow citizens. [If he can forbid] the whole world [but does not] he is seized for [the sins of] the whole world. (Shabbat 54b)

This remains however a powerful idea and an unusual one. What made it unique to Judaism is that it applied to a people scattered throughout the world united only by the terms of a covenant our ancestors made with G-d at Mount Sinai. But it continues, as I have argued, to drive American political discourse likewise even today. It tells us that we are all equal citizens in the republic of faith and that responsibility cannot be delegated away to governments or presidents but belongs inalienably to each of us. We are our brothers' and sisters' keeper.

That is what I mean by the strange, seemingly self-contradictory idea I have argued throughout these essays: that we are all called on to be leaders. Surely this cannot be so: if everyone is a leader, then no one is. If everyone leads, who is left to follow?

The concept that resolves the contradiction is covenant. Leadership is, I have argued, the acceptance of responsibility. Therefore if we are all responsible for one another, we are all called on to be leaders, each within our sphere of influence, be it within the family, the community, the organisation or a larger grouping still.

This can sometimes make an enormous difference. In late summer of 1999 I was in Pristina making a BBC television programme about the aftermath of the Kosovo campaign. I interviewed General Sir Michael Jackson, then head of the NATO forces. To my surprise, he thanked me for what "my people" had done. The Jewish community had taken charge of the city's twenty-three primary schools. It was, he said, the most valuable contribution to the city's welfare. When 800, 000 people have become refugees and then return home, the most reassuring sign that life has returned to normal is that the schools open on time. That, he said, we owe to the Jewish people.

Meeting the head of the Jewish community later that day, I asked him how many Jews were there currently in Pristina. His answer? Eleven. The story, as I later uncovered it, was this. In the early days of the conflict, Israel had along with other international aid agencies sent a field medical team to work with the Kosovan Albanian refugees. They noticed that while other agencies were concentrating on the adults, there

was no one working with the children. Traumatised by the conflict and far from home, they were running wild.

The team phoned back to Israel and asked for young volunteers. Every youth movement in Israel, from the most secular to the most religious, sent out teams of youth leaders at two-week intervals. They worked with the children, organising summer camps, sports competitions, drama and music events and whatever else they could think of to make their temporary exile less traumatic. The Kosovan Albanians were Muslims, and for many of the Israeli youth workers it was their first contact and friendship with children of another faith.

Their effort won high praise from UNICEF, the United Nations children's organisation. It was in the wake of this that "the Jewish people" -- Israel, the American-based "Joint" and other Jewish agencies -- were asked to supervise the return to normality of the school system in Pristina.

That episode taught me the power of hessed, acts of kindness when extended across the borders of faith. It also showed the practical difference collective responsibility makes to the scope of the Jewish deed. World Jewry is small, but the invisible strands of mutual responsibility mean that even the smallest Jewish community can turn to the Jewish people worldwide for help and achieve things that would be exceptional for a nation many times its size. When the Jewish people join hands in collective responsibility they become a formidable force for good. *© 2014 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org*

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

What is the truest definition of freedom? I believe that an exploration of a difference of interpretation between two Talmudic Sages on a phrase in our Torah portion will shed a great deal of light on these fundamental existential questions.

Commenting on the verse which submits that if the nation walks in G-d's ways "…I will give peace in the land, and you shall lie down, and none shall make you afraid, and I will cause evil beasts to cease from the land". [Leviticus 26:6-7] Rav Yehuda explains that the evil beasts "will disappear from the world," whereas Rav Shimon Bar Yohai interprets that only the evil of the beasts will "cease from the land" but not the beasts themselves.

What is the significance of this debate?

To answer, we should first consider another difference of opinion. In last week's portion of Behar we read: "And you shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty (Hebrew, dror) throughout the land… It shall be a Jubilee unto you, and you shall return every man unto his possession, and every man unto his family." [Leviticus 25:10]

'Dror is generally translated as liberty or freedom; Rashi quotes Rav Yehuda (B.T. Rosh Hashana 9b), who associates the word 'dror' with 'dur,' to dwell, teaching that true freedom means the ability to dwell anywhere one wishes, without any restrictions at all. Nachmanides takes an entirely different slant, connecting the Hebrew dror to dor, a generation, citing a famous verse in Ecclesiastes "one generation (dor) passes away and another generation (dor) comes.' [1:4]

Rashi's focuses on the Jubilee's declaration of dror as expressing physical freedom, whereas Nachmanides' explanation focuses on something beyond the physical, on that which gets passed down from generation to generation and represents eternity.

The freedom declared by the Jubilee year grants us the opportunity to realize our true potential, to express our most fundamental essence grounded in the roots of our very being. Rashi insists that this truest essence of the Jew is Torah, the word of G-d symbolized by the sound of the ram's horn at the time of the Revelation. Otherwise, how can we explain the amazing midrash that every fetus in its mother's womb is taught Torah by an angel of G-d? Our Sages are insisting that Torah is the most fundamental ingredient of the existential soul of every Jew! Our most basic identity, our vocation and avocation, our source and our purpose, is Torah – its theoretical teaching as well as the more perfect society it commands us to form.

In the Jubilee Year, slaves go free, debts are rescinded, family homesteads are returned to their original owners; it is also a Sabbatical year, so that the land as well as its owners rest from physical labor. Every seventh year is parallel to every seventh day; instead of working the land, the farmer will work his mind in the vineyard of Torah planting spiritual ideas and ideals.

Most individuals only realize a small percentage of their potential; most of us are "blocked" by all sorts of physical and psychological barriers. We cannot do what we really wish to do, what we are truly capable of achieving, either because a government or a tyrannical employer does not allow us to, or because poverty does not afford us the time and the energy to express ourselves properly ("at the expense of his soul-roots does he bring his bread" chants the Cantor on Yom Kippur), or because damaging childhood experiences cripple our ability to be truly productive.

Now ponder the genius of the Jubilee Year. Every Jew becomes free from external domination returning to their own land under their own government, fruits and vegetables may be eaten freely without back-breaking labor, debts which enslave the poor to their creditors are rescinded; and a year of Torah study frees every Jew from the psychological limitations and addictions which imprison their soul-psyche. Freedom from a Jewish perspective doesn't mean that one is free to do nothing; freedom means that one has the

unfettered ability to express their truest self, to realize their greatest potential. It means the ability to assume responsibility for one-self and one's actions in the fullness of one's maturity. Such freedom enables us to re-activate the "image of G-d" with which we were created, and to bring the redemption by restoring the harmony of Eden.

Torah is the means by which all of this can happen, because it is the Torah which can enable people to overcome their various blocks, assume control of their instincts and destiny, and transform society into what it initially was at the dawn of creation.

Now we are ready to return to the difference of opinion between Rav Shimon Bar Yohai regarding the situation at the time of redemption, when Israel lives by the Divine commandments.

According to Rav Yehuda, the Almighty will effectuate a change in nature: the wild beasts which are still very much a part of our landscape, will be gone, destroyed from the world, in a new era of peace and tranquility.

But according to Rav Shimon bar Yochai, we will effectuate the change in ourselves because we – and the entire universe along with us – will return to our original nature expressing the original purpose of our being. In the words of Nachmanides, "…When Israel observes the commandments, the land of Israel will be like the world at its beginning, before the sin of Adam, when no wild beast or creeping thing would kill a human." [Nachmanides Leviticus 26:6].

We have two ways of conceiving redemption: A world wherein G-d will destroy all evil, or a world wherein the creatures themselves will return themselves to their primordial state of innocence and goodness, when "they shall not do evil or destruction in My entire holy nation because the knowledge of G-d will fill the world." (Isaiah 11:9)

Which vision of the end of the days is better? Nachmanides prefers the interpretation of Rav Shimon Bar Yohai, because therein lies the essence of our nature, the purpose of creation and the true meaning of freedom.

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The Torah completes the book of Vayikra in a very stark and disturbing manner. It describes in great detail the negative face of Jewish uniqueness and its special role in human affairs. The Jewish nation is blessed beyond all others but it is also held to a very rigorous standard. Though it is difficult for us ordinary mortals to justify logically in our minds the events of a 1900 year exile of torment and persecution, somehow in Heaven everything that has occurred to us is justified and necessary. It is certainly not pleasant to have to recall the difficulties of our history. Perhaps that is why Jewish history remains a relatively ignored subject in so many Jewish schools today. But the inclusion of the prediction of what would happen to the Jewish people, as detailed in this week's parsha, remains very instructive.

It is not only the content of that prediction that is so awesome – it is the infinite accuracy of the events that would befall Israel that is so wondrous and incredulous. Ramban declared, almost a millennia ago, that if anyone could predict and accurately describe events that would occur hundreds of years hence, that person would be recognized as a prophet of enormous talent and greatness.

What shall we say nine hundred years after Ramban's detailed prophecy of Moshe's, regarding the fate and events that would befall Israel during its historic journey through human civilization. One has to be particularly prejudiced or obtusely ignorant not to be awestruck by the words that appear in this week's parsha.

We are a different and difficult people. That description of us shines forth from almost every parsha of the Torah. We have a very different and difficult history to relate ourselves to. That is really the reason that the parsha is so detailed and insistent in describing the bleak events of the Jewish future. Most people like to blend in and not advertise their differences and particularities. We all crave recognition, but not all of us want to be treated as celebrities with all of the attendant psychological and emotional baggage that such status invariably brings with it.

The Torah does not allow us to forget for an instant that we are the celebrities on the world stage of events – for good or for better. Moshe emphasizes that truth in his description of the difficulties that Israel will have to encounter and overcome in its future existence. The accuracy of Moshe's words is ironically vaguely comforting for it confirms to us in a most vivid fashion the uniqueness of the Jewish people and the truth of its faith and Torah.

It is most fitting that at the end of the parsha the congregation rises to strengthen itself and others in the core faiths and observances of Torah and Jewish life. To know and believe in our story is to come closer to our Creator and His Torah. Just as the words of the parsha have been completely fulfilled, so too will the blessings of the Torah be recorded for us and promised to us, and be actualized in our lives and days.

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

The blessings in the portion of Behukotai reach toward their crescendo with the words "and I will

walk among you and will be your G-d, and you shall be My people." (Leviticus 26:13) This penultimate gift that is promised is not a material one, it is rather a spiritual one that has extraordinary benefits.

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

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

As we all know, sickness is part of the fabric of life. This world is not made up of the sick and the well, but of the sick and the not yet sick. The worst part of sickness is being alone in sickness. How I remember being wheeled into the hospital room for bypass surgery. At a particular moment, my loving family had no choice but to leave my side. As I was placed on the surgical table, I felt alone, so deeply alone. But right then I sensed the closeness of G-d. If you feel G-d, then even in difficult times, when it might seem that G-d is acting kindly, you still sense the closeness of the Divine.

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

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

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

Each Sefer of Chumash operates within defined historical parameters. Sefer B'reishis starts with creation and ends with the Children of Israel in Egypt. Sefer Sh'mos starts with this nascent nation being subjugated by its host, describes G-d taking them out of Egypt and giving them the Torah, and concludes with G-d dwelling among them in the Mishkan. Sefer Vayikra starts with G-d's first communication with Moshe in that newly constructed Mishkan, goes through many of the laws pertinent to the Temple service (as first performed in the Mishkan) as well as many of the laws that pertain to our becoming a holy nation (and holy individuals), and includes any narrative and additional laws taught before the nation prepared to leave Mt. Sinai. Sefer Bamidbar picks up with the preparations to leave Mt. Sinai and head towards the Promised Land, and concludes with the nation poised to enter it. Sefer D'varim is primarily the speeches Moshe made to the on the doorstep of the Promised Land, shortly before he died, and includes any narrative within that short time frame, including, and concluding with, Moshe's death.

Since the laws regarding donations to the Mishkan/Temple were taught at Sinai and were directly related to the Temple/Mishkan, they were included in Sefer Vayikra. Nevertheless, teaching them at the very end of Sefer Vayikra seems anticlimactic. The verses that conclude the section of the blessings and curses (Vayikra 26:45-46) would make perfect concluding verses for Sefer Vayikra; why were the laws that follow, where a monetary value is established for people, animals and property (in order to determine how much is owed to the Temple when any of them are "donated") tacked on afterwards?

The last three chapters of Sefer Vayikra are different from (most of) the rest of the Sefer, as it was taught while Moshe was on Mt. Sinai rather than in the Mishkan (see Ibn Ezra on 25:1). [There were other laws included earlier that were also taught on Mt. Sinai rather than in the Mishkan (see 7:37-38), but these were directly related to the laws that precede them in the text, so were included there. It should be noted that according to Ramban (7:38) the expression "at Mt. Sinai" does not have to mean literally on the mountain, but could mean next to it, and therefore could be used regarding laws taught to Moshe in the Mishkan. Nevertheless, Ramban agrees (25:1) that the end of Sefer Vayikra was taught earlier, during the last set of 40 days that Moshe spent atop Mt. Sinai.] Because these chapters were all taught earlier, on My Sinai, it makes sense for them to appear at the end of Sefer Vayikra, without interrupting the narrative pertaining to the building of the Mishkan and its operation. Nevertheless, the final chapter, which details how much

money must be given to the Temple when the "value" of people, animal or property is donated, did not have to be the way the Sefer ends, especially since there is some overlap with the laws of Yovel taught before the blessings and curses and could have been included there instead.

S'fornu (26:46) says that the laws taught after the blessings and curses, which constitute the covenant between G-d and His people (according to many it was the "Book of the Covenant" written down and read to the nation before Moshe ascended Mt. Sinai for the first set of 40 days, see Sh'mos 24:7), could not be combined with those laws taught right before them, as keeping the details of the donation process was not a prerequisite for avoiding the curses, whereas the laws taught before the curses were. Nevertheless, unless the final verse provides enough impact, we would have expected a more powerful closing to Sefer Vayikra. The Kotzker Rebbe is quoted as having said that the reason the "values" were given after the curses is to show that even when deserving of curses we have much value; only a half-shekel was needed to gain atonement for the golden calf, yet those in that same demographic (males 20-60) are "valued" at 50 shekel (100 times the part that was affected by sin). Although this would be an appropriate message to end Sefer Vayikra with, it only "works" for one demographic (at least as far as the ratios; the women didn't sin with the golden calf, so no ratio can be determined), and doesn't apply at all to animals and property (which are also part of the "values" established at the end of Sefer Vayikra).

Rabbi Gil Student discusses the seemingly mundane ending to Sefer Vayikra (http://tinyurl.com/nux8atu) quoting several suggestions. One of them is that the Torah wanted to avoid ending Sefer Vayikra with the horrific curses. Even though the second to last verse in that chapter is upbeat, and the last verse is as at least as valid a closing verse as the verse the Sefer ends with, I don't think they are strong enough (or long enough) to counter the bitterness of the curses. It can also be suggested that the curses themselves are really blessings, as they ensure the continuity of the Jewish people, and are therefore an appropriate ending to the Sefer. This is especially true according to the opinion that the blessings and curses constitute the "Book of the Covenant" that cemented our relationship with G-d; what could be a more appropriate ending to the Sefer than our marriage contract with G-d? Either way, though, needing to end with something other than the curses doesn't negate the need to end with something of extreme import and meaning.

There are numerous ways to donate to the Temple. Besides the method described at the end of Sefer Vayikra, one can donate items directly, or donate money directly. The very concept of "Arachin" (assessments), where the item is not donated, nor is its value donated directly, but the item designated for assessment to determine how much money must be given, demands a closer look. If I, who am currently 49 years old, wanted to donate 50 shekel to the Temple treasury, why wouldn't I just pledge that amount instead of donating my own self, which thereby obligates me to give 50 shekel?

We are made up of both physical matter (our bodies) and spiritual aspects (our souls), with the purpose/goal of elevating the former by using it to elevate the latter. The same is true of all physical things. Leather can be used for shoes, or for T'filin; if used for the latter, the leather itself becomes elevated. (Using our shoes to walk to shul or yeshiva, or to visit the sick, etc., elevates them as well.) The reason one would donate the value of a specific item rather than the item itself is in order to continue to use that item. By the same token, the reason one would donate the value of an item rather than just donating that amount of money is to designate that item to be used exclusively for holy purposes. Chazon Ish (Arachin 29:4) compares the change in status of an item whose value is donated to the change in status of someone who becomes a Nazir; an aspect of holiness now resides within it/him. Donating my own self to the Temple demonstrates that I am dedicating my very being to serving G-d, not just parting with some of my valuables. Similarly, donating the value of a specific item demonstrates that its use will be dedicated to serving G-d. (Although this is not as straightforward when donating the value of another person, it can demonstrate the hope that the person will dedicate his or her life to serving G-d.) Rather than being composed of competing substances, with some time and effort expended for physical needs and wants and some dedicated towards spiritual growth, such a "donation" can be a powerful way to establish that both aspects are working towards the same spiritual goal.

The Torah, and specifically the mitzvos included in Sefer Vayikra, are designed to help us develop our level of holiness, with the ultimate goal of being completely dedicated to becoming ever more holy and closer to G-d. Donating one's own body or property through its "value" demonstrates that this is a goal shared by the one donating it, one that is being attempted to be attained. This manifestation of fulfilling the goals of Sefer Vayikra is therefore a most appropriate way to end the Sefer.

RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftorah

This week's haftorah teaches us a profound lesson in trust and faith in Hashem. The prophet Yirmiyahu introduces the haftorah by proclaiming, "Hashem is my strength, my stronghold, my refuge in the day of trouble." Yirmiyahu proceeds and admonishes the Jewish people for pursuing foreign

avenues and engaging in strange practices for security. He warns them that they are subject to forfeiting their wealth and possessions because of their public involvement in idolatry.

He then delivers a crushing blow in the name of Hashem and says, "And you will forsake your land which you are to blame for mistreating the inheritance I gave you and you will be enslaved to your enemies in a foreign land."(17:4) This is the dreadful prophecy about their pending exile from their precious homeland, Eretz Yisroel. Yet, Yirmiyahu devotes his attention to one specific detail as the cause of their exile. He immediately follows with serious reprimand about trust and says, "Cursed is the person who trusts in man...and turns his heart away from Hashem... Blessed is the person who trusts in Hashem." The juxtaposition of these words suggests that the Jewish exile was caused by lack of trust. Apparently, the previous criticism of mistreating the land related to this fault. Rashi develops this and explains that the admonition referred to their failure to properly observe Shmita laws. Yirmiyahu chastised them for mistreating their inheritance by refusing to return it to its true owner during Shmita.

This explanation requires serious reflection. Although the mitzvah of Shmita is undoubtedly significant, it seems to be treated with extreme severity. The prophet equates lack of Shmita observance with total lack of faith in Hashem. This suggests that one who does not properly adhere to Shmita laws has no trust and faith in Hashem!? This is difficult to digest after considering the severe demands of Shmita. During that year, one may not exert any effort towards his personal sustenance and livelihood. Hashem demands that one place his total faith and trust in Him. If one does not achieve this lofty level and fails to display total faith can he be compared to an agnostic possessing no faith?

We can raise similar concern regarding the repercussions of profiting from Shmita fruit. In addition to Shmita's agricultural prohibition one is prohibited from engaging in any profitable transaction with fruit grown during the Shmita year. The Talmud predicts the severe hardships one will endure for violating this prohibition. His first repercussion will be his sale of all his fields and possessions. This process could continue and include the sale of his home and eventually even result in the sale of his daughter as a maid servant. (see Kiddushin 20a) These punishments seem extremely severe relative to their offense. There are many grave sins whose consequences are trivial in comparison to those of Shmita violations. What establishes Shmita so significant as to warrant these responses?

We can shed light on this entire subject through the Malbim's classic commentary on this week's haftorah. He explains that the prophet discusses three approach to one's faith in Hashem. Yirmiyahu showers praise and blessing upon one who places his total trust in Hashem. Although this person undoubtedly involves himself in securing his sustenance he realizes that Hashem is ultimately his true provider. A second prevalent attitude comes from those of dual allegiance, who place their trust in Hashem and in their personal efforts. Although this is certainly not a supreme form of service and doesn't receive words of praise it is nonetheless acceptable. There exists yet a third attitude amongst some, one that is totally unacceptable and condemned by the prophet. Yirmiyahu curses one who places total trust in his personal involvement without even including Hashem as a factor in the equation. This person totally disregards Hashem's involvement and believes that he obtains success and fortune exclusively through personal efforts.

These insightful words place the mitzvah of Shmita in its proper perspective. Every seventh year Hashem reminds us that He is constantly involved in our lives and sustenance. Hashem facilitates this recognition by restricting us from personal involvement in our livelihood for an entire year. One who adheres to Shmita's restrictions clearly demonstrates his total faith in Hashem as his provider. However, one who violates Shmita's laws shows his total belief and trust in his personal efforts. Hashem absolutely banned these efforts during that year and will undoubtedly have no part in helping them bear fruits. Such activity reflects a defiant attitude that Hashem need not be involved for one to succeed. He expresses to all that irrespective of Hashem's approval or involvement these efforts will nevertheless produce as usual.

This totally unacceptable attitude inevitably engages Hashem in a clear demonstration that all sustenance and provisions are ultimately His doing. Hashem's response to such misguided individuals will be to gradually force them to sell their possessions in exchange for basic sustenance. This process helps them realize that all possessions come from Hashem and that He is their sole provider. A similar response will be given to the Jewish people when they display this defiant attitude. Hashem will remind them that He controls their lives and not themselves. Their failure to observe Shmita laws will cause them to forfeit their privilege of living in Eretz Yisroel, the land of Divine Providence. Conceivably whoever merits to live in Eretz Yisroel should sense Hashem's closeness and direct involvement in every step of their lives. If the entire nation fails to recognize this reality it truly has nothing to gain from dwelling in the king's palace. Hashem will therefore banish the people from His presence until they recognize and learn to appreciate His active role in their lives.

If we could only internalize this lesson our lives would be so much better. May we soon merit to return to our father's table with His full return to His people in

the nearest future.

YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

Virtual Beit Medrash

STUDENT SUMMARIES OF SICHOT OF THE ROSHEI YESHIVA HARAV YEHUDA AMITAL SHLIT"A

Summarized by Rav Eliyahu Blumenzweig
Translated by Kaeren Fish

"If you walk in my statutes... I will give your rains at their proper time, and the land will give of its produce and the tree of the field will give its fruit." (Vayikra 23:3-4)

We may ask ourselves, what is so special about this blessing promised to us if we walk in G-d's statutes? After all, is it not natural -- the accepted, expected way of the world -- that the land gives of its produce and that the trees give of their fruit?

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

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

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

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

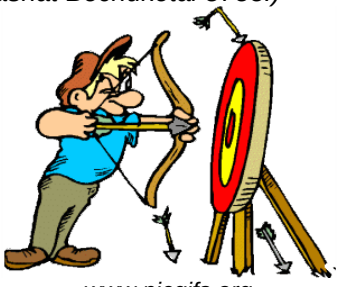
By means of correcting the primal sin man will return to a state where he will no longer constantly live in fear of natural disasters. He will not sow the seeds of his new crop with trepidation, he will no longer walk about fearing wild animals. "And I shall make a covenant with them on that day with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

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

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

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

To date we have not yet merited this blessing in its entirety. But in the meantime we can attempt to apply it in relation to what is written in the first part of the verse, and Chazal's commentary: "If you walk in My statutes -- that you should toil diligently in Torah." Sometimes a person senses that he is not at one with the Torah; he feels that he is waging a constant battle for conquest and control, and he feels helpless. A person is obligated to work towards perfecting himself, at least to the point where one battle -- the question of whether or not he is at one with the Torah -- no longer bothers him. A person must feel himself within the world of Torah, and within this world he can wage the battle for better and more profound understanding, for deeper and more all-encompassing comprehension. But all of this must be based on the feeling that he is "living Torah," not fighting the Torah from outside, not fighting over whether or not to enter the beit midrash. Within this embrace of life he can continue in his struggle towards perfection. *(Originally delivered on Leil Shabbat, Parashat Bechukotai 5733.)*



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