



The Marcos and Adina Katz YUTORAH IN PRINT

Bechukotai 5774

A Casual Curse

Rabbi Shmuel Goldin

As Parshat Bechukotai and the book of Vayikra draw to a close, God delivers a stinging rebuke and warning to the Israelites. Known as the Tochacha Haketana, the small rebuke (in contrast to a second, larger rebuke found in the book of Devarim), this section contains a series of frighteningly prophetic descriptions of the tragedies that will befall the nation should they fail to follow God's ways.

At the core of this tochacha, a word is found that, in this conjugation, appears nowhere else in the Torah text. Here, however, *keri*, this term, *keri*, is repeated no less than seven times within the span of twenty sentences. According to most authorities (see below), this term apparently connotes "casualness" or "happenstance" and is derived from the root *kara*, to happen.

Questions

By using the term *keri* so prominently at both ends of the Tochacha's equation, in both the description of the nation's possible transgression and in the description of God's possible response, the Torah apparently emphasizes a critical idea, central to the very nature of sin and punishment. If we could only understand this concept, the text seems to say, we could finally recognize where we go wrong. We could strike to the core of our failures and their consequences, finding a way to break the recurring, tragic cycle that plagues our relationship with the Divine.

And yet, the text remains frustratingly unclear.

Why, at this point, does the Torah suddenly introduce, for the first and only time, the word *keri*?

Once introduced, why is this term repeated so often in such a short span of text?

Above all, within the context of the Tochacha, in the realm of both sin and punishment, what does the word *keri* actually mean?

Approaches

A: Confronted with this puzzling term and its use in the Tochacha, numerous commentaries propose a wide variety of interpretations.

Both Rashi and his grandson, the Rashbam, for example, introduce a basic translation upon which most commentaries build. These scholars translate the word *keri* to mean "casual" or "inconsistent" (derived, as stated above, from the root *kara*, to happen). If the nation sins by worshipping God in an erratic, inconsistent manner, Rashi and the Rashbam explain, God will respond in kind and will relate to the nation haphazardly and unpredictably, as well. (Rashi, Vayikra 26:21)

A number of other commentaries, including Rabbeinu Bachya and the Ohr Hachaim, choose a related but different path. The term *keri*, these scholars maintain, describes a flawed world outlook that can lead to immeasurable sin. An individual who sees the world in a fashion of *keri* perceives no pattern to the events unfolding around him. In place of Divine Providence, this individual observes only random coincidence; and in place of punishment for sin, accidental misfortune. For such an individual, *tshuva* (return to the proper path) becomes increasingly unattainable. In a haphazard world governed by arbitrary forces, after all, there exists little incentive for change. (Rabbeinu Bachya, *ibid.*; Ohr Hachaim, *ibid.*)

Going a step further, the Ohr Hachaim perceives in God's reaction – "And then I [God], too, will walk with you with *keri* ..." (Vayikra 26:24.) – a carefully calibrated "measure for measure" response to the nation's failing. If the people refuse to see a divinely ordained pattern in the world around them, God will withdraw, making it even more difficult for them to perceive His presence.

The punishments to follow will seem even more random, bearing no obvious connection to the nation's

sins. The people's failure to recognize God's imminence will thus prove frighteningly prophetic, for God will respond with "distance." (Ohr Hachaim, *ibid.*)

For his part, Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch interprets the sin associated with the word *keri* as "indifference" to God's will. Those guilty of this transgression find considerations other than God's will central to their lives and their sporadic obedience to Torah law is thus purely coincidental. God responds to this sin in kind, says Hirsch, by removing His Divine protection from the nation and allowing the natural course of world history to determine their fate. The welfare of the Jewish people will be advanced only coincidentally, when that welfare happens to correspond to the interests and needs of the powerful nations around them. (Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch, Vayikra 26:21, 23–24)

Finally a group of other scholars, Onkelos chiefly among them, diverge from the above explanations entirely and explain the term *keri* to mean "stubbornness" or "harshness." If the nation stubbornly refuses to obey based upon God's law, God's response will be harsh and unforgiving. (Targum Onkelos, Vayikra 26: 21, 23)

B: A clearer understanding of the puzzling term *keri* and its repeated use in the Tochacha can be gained if we consider the basic approach of Rashi and the Rashbam (who interpret the term to mean a casual approach to God's will) in light of the "rules" that govern our own life experiences.

Many years ago, I asked the participants in one of my synagogue classes to name the one most important component in any successful interpersonal relationship. Expecting a plethora of suggestions, I was surprised when they unanimously responded with the one word which I had earlier defined for myself as my own answer: trust.

Our associations with each other, from partnerships to friendships to marriages, can endure many blows and setbacks. One wound, however, invariably proves fatal: the total loss of trust. When mutual trust is gone and cannot

be regained; when the relationship no longer feels safe and secure; when each participant no longer believes that the other consistently has his partner's best interests at heart, the relationship is doomed.

God thus turns to the Israelites and proclaims: "And if you will walk with me *keri*..."

If I find that you are deliberately inconsistent in your commitment to Me; if I find that you are only at My door when you choose to be; if I find that I cannot trust you to seek My presence and relate to Me continually; then I will respond in kind...

"And then I [God], too, will walk with you with *keri*"

You will no longer be able to count on My continuing presence in your lives. I will distance Myself and not be there when you expect Me to be. Our relationship will become casual and inconsistent; all trust will be lost...

God will forgive many failings and sins, but when we lose His trust, the punishments of the Tochacha are the result.

Points to Ponder

The text's prominent use of the puzzling word *keri* in the Tochacha brings our study of Vayikra full circle...

This complex central book of the Torah, with its disparate laws ranging from minute, mysterious rituals to towering ethical edicts, makes one real demand upon the reader.

We are challenged to earn God's trust.

Judaism is not a smorgasbord. The Torah emphasizes that we cannot pick and choose the elements of observance that suit our fancy. Each law, from a seemingly minor sacrificial detail to a powerful edict such as "Love your fellow as yourself," has its place and its purpose. Each halachic element is an essential component in the tapestry of trust meant to be woven between God and his people.

In structure and content, the book of Vayikra reminds us that when we earn God's trust through faithful adherence to His multifaceted law, we will be able to trust in God's continued presence within our lives.

Why No Mention of Olam Ha-Ba in the Tochachah?

Rabbi David Horwitz

Leviticus 26:11-12 (part of the initial berachah part of the tochachah) states: *I will establish My abode in your midst, and I will not spurn you. I will be ever present in your midst: I will be your God.*

Where will the presence of God in the midst of the children of Israel be? The simple explanation is, here on

earth, in Israel. Rashi, however, writes otherwise:

I will (as it were), walk with you in the Garden of Eden as though I were one of you, and you will not be frightened of Me. One might think (that this implies) you will not fear (i.e., have no reverence) for Me. Scripture, however, states ([but] I will be your God (that is, although you will

be with me in the Garden of Eden and not be frightened of Me, you will still possess reverence for me.) (Translation taken from Rosenbaum and Silberman, Pentateuch with Rashi's Commentary [London, 1932], pp. 123a.)

(It is certainly appealing to apply the categories of R. Isaiah Ha-Levi Horwitz, the author of the *Shneh Luhot Ha-Berit* {Shelah} here: According to Rashi, when one will be with God in Gan Eden he will not possess *yire'at ha-onesh* {fear of punishment}, but will nonetheless possess *yire'at ha-romemut* {awe of the majesty of God}.)

The source of Rashi's comment is the Sifra, Midrash Halakhah on Leviticus. But one must ask why Rashi saw fit to quote this passage, and not to interpret the verse according to the plain meaning, viz., that God will be with the righteous here and now in this world. Why did Rashi choose to cite this interpretation?

R. Solomon Ephraim Luntshitz, the author of the commentary *Keli Yaqar* on the Torah, theorized that Rashi was coming to answer a question that has been (and still is) addressed to religious Jews throughout the ages who believe in an afterlife: If there is indeed an afterlife, why is there no mention of *olam ha-ba* (the World to Come) in the Torah?

One should note that this question holds whether one adopts the Maimonidean view that *olam ha-ba* is equivalent to the philosophical notion of immortality of the soul, which itself is interpreted as eternity of the intellect, (according to the Rambam, clear distinctions are made between the terms *olam ha-ba* {the telos of existence in this world}, *tehiyyat ha-metim* {a temporary, transient miraculous phenomenon that will only happen in the future to a small amount of people who will subsequently die again in any event}, and the Messianic Age {a purely political concept}) or whether one adopts the Nahmanidean view, a position that does not distinguish between these terms in the same manner.)

Keli Yaqar writes that Rashi is coming to respond to a certain type of scholar. This person may say, since there is no mention of the World to Come in the Torah, one must surely deduce that the power of *mitzvot* only serves to obtain greater benefits in this world. But this despised world is not worth much! (Remarkably, *Keli Yaqar* does not remark that one who reasons this way will sink into a life of hedonistic excess. On the contrary, he may still be an intellectually-minded scholar. But he will not value the system of acts commanded in the Torah.)

Keli Yaqar proceeds to summarize seven opinions as to why the Torah does not mention the rewards of the World to Come.

(1) Rambam in *Mishneh Torah*, *Sefer Ha-Madda* (*Hilkhot Teshuvah* 9:1): The rewards promised in the Torah only serve to remove impediments that could distract one from serving God. But the Torah never mentions the ultimate reward of *Olam ha-Ba*. Why? In order to reach the religious/intellectual level in which service towards God can be for its own sake (*li-Shemah*), and not for the receipt of reward or fear of punishment.

(2) R. Abraham ibn Ezra in *Parashat Ha'azinu* (*Deut.* 32:39): not even one out of a thousand people can intellectually grasp the notion of *olam-ha-ba*, but the Torah was given to all the children of Israel. *Keli Yaqar* adds that since a physical being cannot understand the non-physical nature of *olam ha-ba*, the Torah simply hid mention of this from the masses, due to their feeble intellects. But the ultimate reward is in the World to Come.

(3) R. Bahya ibn Pakuda (*Keli Yaqar* refers to him as R. Bahya Ha-Zaqen; "the Elder." This appellation apparently serves to distinguish him from R. Bahya ben Asher, student of the Rashba and author of a popular commentary on the Torah. This view is also cited by the ibn Ezra in *Parashat Ha'azinu*, and the Ramban appears to have inclined to his view as well.): The rewards of the Torah are all supernatural. For how else can the meteorological phenomenon of rainfall be dependent upon a certain people observing specific commandments? But the soul is by nature a metaphysical being, and it is not unnatural that it will (eventually) leave the body and this physical realm. Indeed a verse in *Psalms* (37:34) essentially states this. From the fact that only the wicked who receive *karet* do not merit a share in the world to come, one can deduce that as a matter of course, one who is not wicked will indeed receive a share. Hence, there was no need for the Torah to mention the obvious!

(4) Rabbenu Nissim Gerondi, in his comments on *Parashat Bereshit*, utilizing an idea that is already found in R. Yehudah Ha-Levi's *Kuzari*, writes as follows: at the time when the Torah was given, the nations of the world denied the possibility of Divine Providence. They also asserted that whatever was done in the world was done out of necessity, not out of choice. The Torah wished to strengthen the concept of Divine *hashgahah* (and of human free choice as stimulating the possibility of *hashgahah*) as a cornerstone of Jewish belief. Had the Torah mentioned the reward in the World to Come instead of reward in this world, people would have simply persisted in their erroneous belief. (However, by emphasizing that the fall of rainfall, for example, was not necessary but was contingent upon

human action, the Torah sought to refute that view.) Keli Yaqar approvingly cites the remark of the Khazar King to his Jewish friend (the haver), to the effect that people would not mind delaying their reward in the World to Come, if they could live a little bit longer here on earth. Thus, even though the ultimate reward is in the World to Come, the Torah presented a reward that people naturally desire, and taught that it is in human power to achieve it.

(5) R. Sa'adiah Gaon, in his *Emunot be-De'ot*, and the Rambam in the 3rd part of his *Guide for the Perplexed* both write that the nations of the world at the time when Moses received the Torah sacrificed towards the stars and constellations in order to receive agricultural benefits (rainfall and the like). When God gave the Torah, He wished to wean the children of Israel away from these behaviors, and therefore emphasized that observance of the laws of the Torah will yield these benefits, whereas any sort of idolatrous worship will produce the opposite result. But He did not need to promise them anything regarding the world to come, for the nations of the world were not promised success in the World to come for their efforts in the first place.

(6) The Torah actually does hint at the World to Come. For when the Torah writes such verses as I will be ever present in your midst (Lev. 26:12, the aforementioned verse upon which Rashi comments that “the righteous will walk with God in Gan Eden”) it is referring to the propinquity between the Shechinah of God and the virtuous Jewish soul in this world. One can now utilize a *qal va-homer* and deduce the following; if the soul can cling to the Shechinah even in this world, surely it will be able to cling to the Shechinah in the non-physical world to come. Keli Yaqar notes that R. Yehudah Ha-Levi, at the end of the 1st Book of the *Kuzari*, writes how the Torah promises children of Israel rewards in the World to Come, just as the other false religions promised their adherents bliss in the World to Come, and this is seen from the words

of the Prophets of the Bible as well. Keli Yaqar writes that R. Nissim Gerondi in his *Derashot* made this point as well.

(7) Finally, Keli Yaqar quotes R. Joseph Albo (*Sefer Ha-Iqqarim*, chapter 40), who presents an idea found already in the Ramban to Parashat Ekev (Deuteronomy 11:13) that the mundane rewards cited in the *tochachah* are meant for the Jewish nation as a whole. But the reward of any individual person can only be according to the (sum of his) deeds.

After mentioning these seven views, Keli Yaqar adds his observation. The Torah tells us the extent of the love of God for Abraham Isaac and Jacob. If rewards in this world was the sum total of the rewards that God would give anyone, how could Abraham claim to have had more success than Nimrod? The latter ruled over the world, whereas Abraham lived as a nomad his entire life. The same point could be made for the other two patriarchs Isaac and Jacob. It would not do, he adds, to write that that the blessings that their descendants received would constitute their blessings, for what good would that accomplish for someone after his death. The only way to make sense out of the life of the patriarchs, he concludes, is to posit the existence of a World to Come in which the righteous will indeed prosper. To be sure, he finally concludes, this portion in the World to Come was not the exclusive property of the patriarchs, it was (and is) the reward that God promises to all the righteous people through the ages, for they all possess the same Torah.

(This dissertation by the Keli Yaqar can serve to reinforce an impression that I have gleaned from his writings. Although not a Maimonidean, he is certainly not as anti-rationalist as is generally assumed in certain circles. In this piece, R. Solomon Ephraim Luntshitz displays both a command of the Jewish medieval philosophical literature, sensitivity to both exegetical and moral/philosophical issues, and a profound sense of righteousness, a theme that pervades all of his writings.)

The Judgement of Shavuot

Rabbi Meir Goldwicht

The gemara in Megillah (31b) teaches: R' Shimon ben Elazar says, Ezra enacted that B'nei Yisrael read the *klalot* (curses) of sefer Devarim before Rosh HaShanah and those of sefer VaYikra before Shavuot so that we “finish the year and its curses.” This makes sense for Rosh HaShanah, but is Shavuot a “rosh hashanah” that

the principle of “finish the year and its curses” applies? To answer this challenge, the gemara quotes a mishnah that says on Shavuot we are judged regarding *peirot ha'ilan* (the fruit of the trees), and therefore it is also a rosh hashanah. As the year comes to an end, we wish to leave behind all of the curses and start the coming year with *bracha*.

The gemara's answer is perplexing. After all, the same mishnah that says Shavuot is a rosh hashanah for peirot ha'ilan also says that Pesach is a rosh hashanah for crops. Why don't we read the klalot before Pesach?

Rather, the explanation of this gemara is as follows: The Torah compares Man to a tree, as it says, "Ki ha'adam eitz hasadeh, For man is the tree of the field" (Devarim 20:19). Man's avodah (mission) in life is compared to a tree, as we say, "V'chayei olam nata b'tocheinu, He planted eternal life within us" (Birchot haTorah). Man's reward is compared to a tree – this is Gan Eden. This comparison to the trees is not meaningless – there are several parallels between us and the trees. Unlike a seed, which must rot in order to produce a new plant, a tree remains kayam, intact and alive, even as it produces peirot (fruit). So too, Man remains kayam as he produces peirot, both in bringing life to the next generation and in being productive and creative in many other ways. This explains why the Gra points out, when the Torah says that Hashem created Man "b'tzelem El okim, in the image of the L-rd," that the gematriah of tzelem is eitz, tree.

Similarly, every tree consists of three parts: roots, trunk, and fruit. In avodat Hashem there are also three parts: tefillah, Torah, and ma'asim tovim. These three parts of avodat Hashem parallel the three parts of the tree. Tefillah is parallel to the roots of the tree, because through tefillah we attach ourselves to HaKadosh Baruch Hu. Torah is parallel to the trunk, because Torah is the pillar that holds up the world. Ma'asim tovim parallel the fruit of the tree.

When HaKadosh Baruch Hu created Man, the Torah says "vayitzer, He created" with two yuds. Rashi explains that each yud represents an act of yetzirah: one for this world and one for the next. The yetzirah of this world was performed by HaKadosh Baruch Hu, Who created Man physically. The second yetzirah is up to Man, who must be born anew spiritually.

What does it mean that on Shavuot we are judged regarding the peirot ha'ilan? Man is judged how much siyata dishmaya he will have in Torah from this Shavuot until the next Shavuot and whether or not he will produce abundant peirot this year. For this reason, before Shavuot we read the klalot, in order to keep them behind us as we start a new blessed year.

We can now understand a Rashi at the beginning of this week's parasha. The Torah says, "Im bechukotai teileichu, If you walk in My statutes" (VaYikra 26:3) and Rashi explains, "That you shall be ameilim (toil) in Torah."

Rashi's mission is to explain pshat in the passuk – how does pshat here refer to ameilut in Torah? The answer is that chok does not just mean "law," but it also comes from the word "chakikah, engraving." Becoming a person in whom the Torah is engraved, that he and the Torah are one, requires tremendous ameilus. This is the meaning behind "Im bechukotai teileichu," and this leads to "V'eitz hasadeh – Man – yitein piryo."

For this reason, we find trees associated with every new beginning in Am Yisrael. Immediately after yetziat Mitzrayim and the splitting of Yam Suf, the Torah says, "Vayoreihu Hashem eitz...vayimteku hamayim, Hashem showed [Moshe] a tree...and the waters became sweet" (Shemot 15:25). When B'nei Yisrael enter Eretz Yisrael, the Torah commands them, "Ki tavo'u el ha'aretz untatem kol eitz, When you come to the land and plant trees" (VaYikra 19:23). When a child is born, the gemara in Gitin says, there is a custom to plant one type of tree for boys and another type of tree for girls. When the children grow up, we use the branches of these trees to hold up the chuppah. The prominent role trees play in every new beginning is meant to serve as a reminder that every time a person starts something new, in order for it to blossom, grow, and succeed, he must remember his own relationship to the tree, leading him to be very serious about tefillah, Torah, and ma'asim tovim.

Every Shabbat in "Mizmor shir l'yom haShabbat" (Tehillim 92) we say, "Shetulim b'veit Hashem, b'chatzrot Elokeinu yafrichu, Those planted in the house of Hashem will blossom in the courtyards of our L-rd" (v. 14). Beit Hashem is the beit midrash; chatzrot Elokeinu is where one goes after he leaves the beit midrash, every person to his own field of work and to his own place. In order for everything to blossom and be successful in the chatzrot Elokeinu, one first needs to be shetulim b'veit Hashem. As long as the shatil (plant) grew up in the house of Hashem, you can be sure that it will succeed on the outside as well.

This is what we are judged about on Shavuot – how much we will be shetulim b'veit Hashem. According to this judgment, we will merit to blossom in the chatzrot Elokeinu, leading us to "Od yenuvun b'seivah, d'sheinim v'ra'ananim yih'yu, They will continue to be fruitful in their old age, they will be full of sap and richness" (v. 15). May we understand these lessons and merit to live the passuk, "V'hayah k'eitz shatul al palgei mayim, And he shall be like a tree planted by streams of water" (Tehillim 1:3).

Reward and Punishment

Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald

In Leviticus 26:3, the Al-mighty declares: “*Im b’choo’ko’tai tay’lay’choo, v’et mitz’vo’tai tish’m’roo, va’ah’see’tem o’tahm.*” If you follow My decrees and observe My commandments and perform them: G-d promises to provide rain in its proper time and great abundance in the fields. The Al-mighty assures the people that peace and security will prevail in the land and that their enemies will fall before them. In Leviticus 26:9, G-d states that He will turn his attention to the Jewish people, make them fruitful and increase them and establish His covenant with them.

But, the Al-mighty also admonishes the people not to turn aside. In Leviticus 26:14, He warns: “*V’im lo tish’m’ooh lee, v’lo tah’ah’soo ayt kohl ha’mitz’vot ha’ay’leh,*” If you will not listen to Me and not perform all of these commandments—if you annul My covenant, then I will do the same to you. And so begins the Torah portion known as the Tochacha—G-d’s extensive reproof of the Jewish people that is contained in verse after verse of the entire 26th chapter of Leviticus.

The question of Divine accountability, a major feature of Jewish theology, has been discussed previously in our parasha analyses (see Bereshith 5762-2001). It is expressed with particular intensity in the second paragraph of the Shema prayer, the source of which is Deuteronomy 11:13: “*V’ha’yah im sha’mo’ah tish’m’ooh el mitz’vo’tai ah’sher ah’no’chee m’tza’veh et’chem ha’yom,*” and it will come to pass, if you listen to My commandments, that I command you today to love G-d, to serve Him with all your heart and soul, then G-d will provide rain in your land in its proper time. But, G-d warns, if your hearts are seduced and you turn away to serve other gods, then the wrath of G-d will be kindled against you!

Upon careful analysis of the above texts, a number of fundamental issues arise with regard to the nature of Divine accountability. In his very important work, *Meditations on the Torah*, B.S. Jacobson discusses some of these issues. He cites the Abarbanel (1437-1508, Spanish statesman, philosopher and commentator) who asks: Why do all the rewards in the Torah seem to be expressed in material terms—abundance of rain, crops, fruit of the land, fruit of the womb, etc.? Why is there no promise of perfection for the soul and no mention

of spiritual immortality? Isn’t the perfection of the soul the ultimate objective of Judaism? Jacobson notes that both the Abarbanel and Isaac Arama (1420-1494, Spanish Talmudist and exegete, also known as the Akeidat Yitzchak) contend that the biblical texts themselves seem to verify the claim of the enemies of the Jews who argue that Judaism denies any spiritual reward after death.

The fact that spiritual reward is not clear and obvious from the text has given rise to those, like the philosopher Ahad Ha’am (1856-1927, Asher Ginzberg, Zionist leader, thinker and writer), who questions the validity of the concept of Olam Ha’bah (World to Come) in Judaism. In his essay, *Flesh and Spirit*, Ahad Ha’am argues that the concept of Olam Ha’bah, and the other-worldly rewards are not original biblical concepts but rather developed only after the destruction of the First Temple in 586 B.C.E., after the people had lost all hope. It was at this point, due to the pervasive despair of the people, that Judaism was compelled to find a new approach to the concept of reward and punishment. It did so by separating the body from the soul and by arguing that while it is true that the body would not survive eternally, the soul would. For all the injustices that the body experienced in this world, there would be infinite spiritual reward in the World to Come. That is why our sages in Avot 4:21, maintain that this world is only a vestibule for the World to Come. Prepare yourself in the vestibule (this world), the sages urge, so that you may enter into the banquet hall (World to Come).

The traditional commentators take strong umbrage at the suggestion that the concept of reward in the World to Come is not of biblical origin and may be of later vintage. The Ibn Ezra (R’ Abraham Ibn Ezra, 1098-c.1164, Spanish Bible commentator) cites the verse in Deuteronomy 32:39: I kill and make alive, I have wounded and I heal. Since the verse mentions death first and only afterwards life, the Ibn Ezra sees this verse as proof of life in the World to Come. He similarly regards the verse in I Samuel 2:6, “the Lord kills and makes alive, brings down to the grave and brings up,” as additional proof for Judaism’s unequivocal belief in the revival of the dead.

Maimonides (the Rambam, the great Jewish philosopher, codifier and physician, 1135-1204) in the Laws of Teshuvah 8:7, claims that the reason that

all allusions to the World to Come are only hinted at vaguely in scriptures is because mortal man has no way of knowing or comprehending the nature of the World to Come. In order to discourage speculation and derision, emphasis on the concept of the World to Come was diminished. Maimonides therefore maintains that all the material rewards that the Torah promises are not really compensation for a good life in this world, but rather serve as Divine support to enable people to merit goodness in this world. These material gifts facilitate the peoples' success in making the best of their lives in this world, so that real reward will await them in the World to Come.

Nachmanides (Ramban, Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman, 1194-1270, Spanish Torah commentator) attempts to answer this conundrum by noting that the Torah makes a distinction between the collective Jewish community and individual Jews. Nachmanides maintains that the rewards of ample rainfall and abundance of corn and wine, and the threats of drought and famine occur only in response to the

conduct of the majority of the people. Accountability and compensation are therefore mentioned only in the second paragraph of the Shema which speaks of the community, not individuals.

And so it seems that material blessings such as weather and wealth, are showered upon a deserving community in this world only, while personal spiritual rewards are set aside for the World to Come.

The Akeidat Yitzchak, however, disagrees with all this. He simply rejects the perception that the Torah emphasizes material rewards at the expense of spiritual rewards. Citing the verse in Exodus 26:11, he notes G-d's promise to be with the Jewish people at all times: "And I will set My abode among you and will be your G-d, and you shall be My people." What greater spiritual reward can there be than to always be in G-d's presence—in this world? Despite the paucity of frequent textual references, declares Arama, spiritual rewards are to be found in both this world as well as the World to Come.

The Value of Hard Work

Rabbi Yisroel Kaminetsky

When I was growing up, I had a friend who used to refer to our generation as "the microwave generation". Everything had to take two minutes or less, or people would not do it. With the explosion in information technology, that account has become even further multiplied. While for sure there are many advantages to technology, one area of concern is when kids see the power of one click of a mouse; the result can be that the value of a process, of sustained effort and hard work at a task, can get overlooked.

Chazal, in commenting on the opening passuk in this week's parsha, call our attention to the necessity for hard work when it comes to the most important activity we engage in, the study of Torah. On the passuk "*Im Bechukotay Taylaychu*" (26:3), Rashi quotes from the Sifra "*Shetihyu Amailim Batorah*", that the Torah here is exhorting us to work hard at the study of Torah. Rashi further comments that the implication of the pesukim is that if we put in the effort, this will result in "*V'et mitzvotay tishmiru v'asitem otam*", we will guard and perform the commandments. In a foreboding comment a few pesukim later (26:14-15), Rashi goes so far as to

say that all the curses that we read about this week come about because of the original problem of people who are not willing to invest the effort in Torah study. He sees an allusion in the pesukim that there is a seven-fold progression that leads to the curses. He who does not put in effort does not learn, and therefore does not perform the mitzvot, then hates those that do, and then hates the Rabbis who preach one should perform them. He then prevents others from performing mitzvot, and then rejects mitzvot altogether, finally getting to level that he rejects Hashem. But it all starts, claims Rashi, from a lack of willingness to put in the effort.

It is for this reason, states the Taz, (O.C. 47:1) that the ber-acha on the study of Torah was formulated not as "*lilmod torah*", to study Torah, but rather "*la'asok b'divrei torah*", to involve one's self in the study of Torah. Ben Hay Hay taught in Pirkei Avot (5:23), "As per the pain, so is the reward". The Rambam in his commentary to the Mishna elaborates, "the study that man engages in through hard work and effort will last with him, however the study that he does in a relaxed pleasant way will not last". Similarly, the Midrash in Kohelet on the passuk (2:9) "*Af Chachmati*

Amda li" comments that this passuk refers to "*Torah shelamadti b'af*", the Torah that lasts with a person is the Torah that he studies with effort, passion, commitment, and hard work. R' Yisroel Salanter explains that this is why the gemara in Nida (30b) teaches us that after a baby in the womb learns the entire Torah, the angel comes and makes him forget it. The message is that the Torah studied with no effort does not last, and therefore the baby must now relearn everything with effort. Finally, in this same vein, the Chofetz Chaim explains the lines from Masechet Berachot (28b) that we say at a siyum. "*Anu Amaylim, vihaim amaylim. Anu amaylim u'mkablin s'char, v'haim amailim v'aynam mikablim s'char*". Asks the Chofetz Chaim, is it true that those who toil at work get no re-ward? Explains the Chofetz Chaim, the difference is that one who works, gets

paid for the result that he produces, no matter how much effort he puts in. When it comes to the study of Torah, however, "*anu amaylim um'kablim s'char*", we get reward for the effort alone, regardless of the results.

We need to teach our children not only the importance of investing energy in Talmud Torah, but also the value of hard work in all areas of worthwhile endeavor. Nothing that is really worth something in life will come about without ef-fort. In Education, our generation is extremely result-oriented. We are focused too much on test scores, results, and num-bers. We need to train our kids that often the effort and the learning process and assimilating and accumulating the knowledge are more important than what we can memorize for twenty minutes and spit back on an exam.

Walking with Torah

Rabbi Zvi Shiloni

Parshat Bechukotai opens with the pasuk: "im bechukotai telechu ve-et mitzvotai tishemru" "If you will follow My decrees and observe My commandments and perform them" (Vayikra 26:3). Rashi comments: "if you will follow My decrees' - shetihyu ameilim baTorah - that you should be laboring in the Torah". Much has been said and written with regard to these words of Rashi. How does Rashi know that "if you will follow My decrees" refers to Torah study, and furthermore what is his source that the Torah study referred to here refers to ameilut - toiling.

Extensive and fascinating insights have been offered by the Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh, by the Kli Yakar, and countless others. I would like to add just one more small thought.

Perhaps Rashi notes the unusual use of the verb telechu which in context means "to follow" but literally means to walk. This verb appears incongruous with mitzvah performance, especially chukim. The verbs asiyah - to do, or perhaps shmira - to safeguard, are more commonly used with regard to mitzvah observance. The verb halicha - to walk, generally has the connotation of movement, growth, and purposeful goals that are not generally associated with the performance of a singular act of a chok such as refraining from wearing kilayim or the sprinkling of the

parah adumah.

Anyone who has ever been in a Yeshiva is well aware that real growth, in a Jewish sense, results from a person's deep involvement in the study of Torah. It is the delving into and the struggling with the words of HaKadosh Baruch Hu and of Chazal that lead a person down a path of self-awareness and spiritual growth.

When we study Torah, more specifically when we are ameilim - toiling - in Torah we can actually feel as if we are walking along a path that is going to enlighten our life and bring us to a closer relationship with HaKadosh Baruch Hu.

The first words Hashem spoke to Avraham Avinu, the first Jew, were lech lecha - literally - "go for yourself". The Torah describes the last day of Moshe Rabenu's life in terms of "vayelech Moshe", even though we have no evidence that he was walking anywhere. The essence of a Jew's life is to walk, to move, to grow.

As HaRav Bina Shlit"a always says: "in Judaism you are either going up or going down". Being a Jew means to resist the temptation to stagnate - from the very beginning of one's journey in life, until his very last day. His journey is fueled by ameilut baTorah, and this is what will carry us to our final destination.