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Yeshiva University Torah MiTzion Beit Midrash Zichron Dov

Parshiyot Behar-Bechukotai

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Yerushalayim: See the World to Come in the World that Is Rabbi Baruch Weintraub

“If you will follow My statutes and observe My commandments and perform them, I will send your rains in their time, the land will yield its produce, and the tree of the field will give forth its fruit.” (Vayikra 26:3-4)

These promises of prosperity, given by Hashem to his people, have puzzled the commentators for many generations. Their perplexity has stemmed less from what the Torah says, and more from what is absent. In the words of Don Isaac Abarbanel, “Why is it that all of the rewards promised by the Torah are physical? Why were the people not promised the perfection of their soul and its reward in the afterlife, since that is the end of all men and their true success?”

As Abarbanel notes, this question was not only philosophical or interpretative; rather, it carried a heavy existential weight, as it was used by Christians to undermine the Jews’ hope to be compensated in the afterlife for their sufferings in this world. Christian theologians (some of them converted Jews) who claimed that the Torah never promised the Jews a reward in the afterlife mocked this hope.

Abarbanel offered no fewer than seven different answers. We will briefly present six of them here:

1. **Rambam** – The Torah omits otherworldly reward in order to encourage altruistic mitzvot; the passages describing reward in this world are meant to promise the means to serve Hashem without disruption.

2. **Ibn Ezra** – The Torah omits discussion of reward in the afterlife because it is a spiritual concept beyond the understanding of most people. Hashem promised a reward which could be understood by all.
3. **Rabbeinu Bachya** – The Torah omits explanation of the afterlife’s reward because it is a natural phenomenon; the rewards described in the Torah are miraculous.
4. **Rabbi Saadia Gaon** – The Torah promises reward in order to fight the attraction of idolatry. Since priests of idolatry promise physical reward, the Torah also offers promises in that realm.
5. **Ramban** – The Torah promises national reward, and the afterlife is a personal experience.
6. **Kuzari** – The Torah does not promise that which cannot be proved; the Torah puts its words to the test by presenting promises for this world.

All of these answers are intriguing, but I would focus on the seventh answer presented by Abarbanel, also in the name of Rabbi Yehuda Halevi in his Kuzari. According to this answer, a close reading of our parshah will reveal that the Torah did indeed choose to address the people with a reward for this world. However, the reward is not physical. The promise made by Hashem is, “I will place My dwelling in your midst,” “I will walk among you and be your G-d, and you will be My people.” (Vayikra 26:11-12) The goal is not only a spiritual elevation in a strictly spiritual world, but a deep spiritual experience here on Earth.

Abarbanel notes that this view solves the problem of the “missing afterlife”. If G-d promises spiritual satisfaction while the soul is confined in a material body, how much more so will it be in the afterlife, with the physical weights finally removed. However, we will focus on the meaning that this explanation gives to our world. If we were to formulate this meaning in one word, it would be: Redemption.

What the Torah promises us, according to this point of view, is the ability to redeem this world. It enables us to go beyond merely seeing this world as a corridor leading to a completely different and altered existence, connected to it only by the means of actions and consequences, and into seeing our mission in this world as rebuilding the corridor into the main room. The “world to come” is here within, waiting for us to expose it - and so is G-d.

Yerushalayim, in itself, embodies this dream of connecting heaven and earth – a heavenly and a physical city merged into one. Its liberation 48 years ago let us glimpse, for a short time, how the world can look like when the promise of, “I will walk among you and be your G-d, and you will be My people” begins its realization.

Yom Yerushalayim sameach, and may we merit the completion of our redemption!

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The Rav Speaks

**Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik
English, trans. from Yiddish
Judaica Press, 2002**

About this book

In 1950's and 1960's America, Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik was the rabbinical leader of Religious Zionist Judaism. Although he had been a member of American *Agudas Yisroel's Moetzes Gedolei haTorah* in the 1940's, in the ensuing years Rabbi Soloveitchik came to believe that Religious Zionism was the path most desirable to Hashem, and he joined Mizrachi.

Renowned for his erudition, wisdom and integrity, Rabbi Soloveitchik inspired many thousands of followers with his eloquent, Torah-grounded presentation of a worldview that mandated careful halachic observance and vigorous support for the State of Israel. One articulation of his ideas on Zionism came in his *Kol Dodi Dofek* 1956 Hebrew address delivered on Yom ha'Atzmaut, 1956, at Yeshiva University (reviewed in Toronto Torah 6:12). Another was in his set of five Yiddish addresses to the annual conventions of Mizrachi between 1962 and 1967. These addresses were translated into Hebrew and published as *Chamesh*

Derashot, and later into English as *The Rav Speaks*. In these addresses, Rabbi Soloveitchik articulated a profound philosophy of Zionism and a robust vision for religious political activism in a modern State of Israel.

Each of the five addresses examines elements and themes from the book of Bereishit, and applies them to the Religious Zionist mission. For example, the first talk examines the conflicting visions of Joseph and his brothers, and identifies Joseph's message of leaving comfortable Canaan with that of the Zionists who left Europe for then -Palestine. In another example, the second talk studies the relationship between Yaakov and Esav as envisioned by their parents, and identifies Rivkah's model with that of Mizrachi. The speeches are in relatively simple language, meant to appeal to a popular audience.

Is this book still relevant?

In the preface to the Hebrew edition, the publishers write, "Although these speeches were presented in historical circumstances which differ from our own, we hope that readers will find that these speeches, with the insights and values they present, contain light to illuminate our path today as well."

In this reviewer's mind, the speeches certainly succeed in this regard. They respond to practical challenges, and their message is timeless.

In one of these five speeches, Rabbi Soloveitchik coined a fourteenth *Ani Maamin* declaration of faith for the Jewish people: "What is this *Ani Maamin*? It is expressed in a simple declaration: I believe, with complete faith, that this Torah is to be fulfilled, actualized and fully executed in every place and every era, in all social, financial and cultural circumstances, in all technological circumstances and political conditions. Torah is to be actualized, whether in the simple society and homogeneous market of the ghetto... or in the modern, scientifically developed and designed society, in which the Jew is an integral part of his environs beyond any connection with his personal domain. Torah is to be actualized whether in exile, where it relates to the personal life of the Jew, or in the Jewish state, where it is required to address novel challenges and to encompass, as well, the structures of communal life." This is but one worthy example of the eternally relevant messages found within *The Rav Speaks*.

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613 Mitzvot: #436: To destroy idolatry

Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

Many of the Torah's mitzvot focus on separating the Jewish nation from the idols of their neighbours. This includes prohibitions against worshipping idols (Mitzvot 28 and 29 in the count of *Sefer haChinuch*), producing idols (Mitzvot 27 and 39), and owning or using idols (Mitzvot 428 and 429). In addition, there is a mitzvah of distancing one's self from idolatry, in its various forms. (Mitzvot 86, 87 and 462) In Devarim 12:2, the Jews entering the land of Canaan are given an additional command, "You shall destroy all of the places where the nations serve [their idols]." This is numbered by *Sefer haChinuch* as the Torah's 436th mitzvah.

Of course, a Jew living in the age of Al Qaeda and ISIS must be somewhat disturbed by this mitzvah; are we meant to be the equals of rampaging terrorists, invading lands and demolishing their museums and heritage sites?

It is hard to find any resolution which will fully address this concern, but two points are worth noting:

- The Torah does not anticipate an ISIS-esque rampage. The obligation is not to seek out idolatry wherever it is located; the command is specific to the land of Israel. (Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Avodah Zarah 7:1) Further, the obligation does not extend to attacking ruins, museums and defunct sites dedicated to tourism; when people who worship an idol abandon its service, the idol loses its status. (Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Avodah Zarah 8:11)
- On a philosophical level, the Torah commands the destruction of idolatry because it perceives in idolatry a profound offense to G-d, as well as a primary root for the worst human corruption.

The Torah links idolatry with socially perverse communities. From the humiliation of intoxicated Noach involving his son Cham and his grandson Canaan, to Avraham's warning about the debauchery of Egypt and the Philistines in Gerar, to the barbaric abuses of Sdom, to the rape and lawlessness of Shechem, the book of Bereishit conveys the message that the society's of pagan Canaan paired idolatry with the greatest immorality. This is not taken as mere correlation, but as cause and effect; Vayikra 18:3 warns the Jew not to emulate the deeds of the lands of Egypt and Canaan, and then it launches into a list of varieties of sexual immorality – capped by a prohibition against worship of the Moloch idolatry. Through the biblical lens, an embrace of pantheism brings with it social irresponsibility, and an emulation of the hedonism associated with the pantheon's own deities.

In this light, idolatry is not only a personal peccadillo which is between G-d and the individual, such that modern society might say "To each his own," but a pernicious undermining of our world on levels both spiritual and physical. In a world which no longer sees idolatry that way, it is understandable that we will feel more comfortable with relativism than with the rampage – but perhaps we ought to then ask ourselves: Does *anything* deserve destruction?

This mitzvah remains difficult to accept, but it raises questions deserving our contemplation.

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Biography

Rabbi Yitzchak Arama

Rabbi Josh Gutenberg

Adapted from a biography
written by Rabbi Adam Frieberg

Rabbi Yitzchak Arama was born in Spain in 1420. After serving as head of a rabbinical academy in Zamora, Spain, he became a community teacher in Tarragona. Later he served as the community rabbi in Calatayud until he was expelled with the rest of Spanish Jewry in 1492. He then settled in Naples, Italy, where he died in 1494.

Like many Spanish scholars of his time, Rabbi Arama was a Talmudist; he considered the study of Talmud to be extremely important. He was despondent when the community in Tarragona was unable to financially support his students, forcing him to move on and leave those students behind.

In addition to his focus on the Talmud, Rabbi Arama was well-versed in both Jewish and secular philosophy. This was especially important in medieval Spain, where no community leader would be respected without this knowledge. He was fluent in Maimonidean philosophy, although he did not always agree with all of its positions. His thought was largely influenced by the *Zohar* and Rabbi Yehudah HaLevi, and this is evident in his work.

Rabbi Arama wrote a prominent commentary to the Torah, *Akeidat Yitzchak*. The commentary consists of over one hundred lectures on the weekly *parshah*. Each lecture includes a passage from the *Zohar* and a philosophical discourse based on that passage. His ideas are often quoted in Don Isaac Abarbanel's commentary to the Torah, although he usually is not cited by name. Some of his other written works include a commentary on the five *megillot* as well as a commentary on *Mishlei*. His works were so influential that the Chida wrote of him, some 250 years later, "All of the writings of the orators drink from his faithful waters."

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Torah and Translation

Why doesn't the Torah link Matan Torah and Shavuot?

Rabbi Yitzchak Arama, *Akeidat Yitzchak*, Emor Shaar 65

Translated by Rabbi Josh Gutenberg

והנה יש בכאן שאלה חזקה והיא: למה לא פרשה התורה שהיום הזה שהוא חג השבועות, נזכור ונעשה אותו לזכר מתן התורה האלוקית וקבלתה, כמו שיחוייב ממה שהחזק בידינו ממנהגינו ומנהג אבותינו בתיקוני תפילתינו וקריאת פרשיותינו, על דרך שפרשה בחג המצות ובחג הסוכות גם ביום הדין ויום הכפורים?

אלא שיש לי להשיב בזה שתי תשובות:

האחד כי אין שום מבוא לתורה לצוות על זה הענין כי אם אחר קבלתה, כמו שכתבו הראשונים ז"ל שאין שום טעם שיהא מצואות ד' מצוה לפי שאין מצוה מבלי שיקדם מצואות מצוה כי על כן לא מנאה בעל הלכות גדולות ז"ל בכלל המצוות כמו שכתב הרמב"ן ז"ל בספר המצוות שלו וכן איך תצוה התורה שנחוג יום קבלתה והתחלת מצואותיה אם אין אנו חייבין לשמוע בקולה אם לא בהיות זה מקובל אצלנו לאמת תחלה:

והשני לפי שזיכרון התורה וקבלתה אינו לזמן מיוחד כשאר ענייני המועדים, רק מצוותה בכל יום וכל עת ובכל שעה, דכתיב (יהושע א') "לא ימוש ספר התורה הזה מפידך והגית בו יומם ולילה" ובכל יום ויום אנו מצווים שיהיו חדשים וחביבים בעינינו כיום שניתנו בו, דכתיב "היום הזה ד' אלוקיך מצווך" (דברים כ"ו, ט"ז). כדאיתא במדרש (תנחומא פרשת כי תבא)... ולענין מתן תורה סמכה על הפרסום הנכתב מפורש בפרשת בחדש השלישי (שמות יט) אשר הוא פרסום נפלא שאי אפשר להתעלם. ושני הטעמים נכונים בעיני.

Behold, there is a strong question here which is: Why didn't the Torah explicitly state that [on] this day, which is the holiday of Shavuot, we should remember and make it a remembrance of the giving of the Divine Torah and its acceptance? This would be logical, given our established custom, and the custom of our ancestors, in the text of our prayers and the Torah reading, to state [similar remembrances] regarding the holidays of Pesach and Sukkot, and also on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur?

I have two answers to resolve this:

First, there is no way for the Torah to command this other than after it is accepted, just as the earlier rabbis wrote that there is no reason that [belief in] the existence of G-d [should be considered a] commandment, because there are no commandments without assuming that G-d's existence is a commandment. For this reason Bahag did not include it in his count of the commandments, as Ramban writes in his [comments on] *Sefer haMitzvot*. Similarly, how could the Torah command us to celebrate the day of accepting [the Torah] and the beginning of its existence, unless we had already accepted this matter to be true?

The second [reason] is that commemorating the Torah and its acceptance cannot be [limited] to a specific time like other matters of the holidays. This commandment [applies] every day, every moment and every hour as is written, "The book of Torah shall not move from your mouth, and you shall meditate upon it day and night." (Yehoshua 1:8) Every single day we are commanded [to view the Torah] as new and beloved in our eyes like [it was on the] day it was given, as is written, "On this day G-d, your Lord, commands you..." (Devarim 26:16) as explained by Midrash Tanchuma (Ki Tavo)... Regarding the giving of the Torah, [the Torah] relied upon the publicity written explicitly in the section, "In the third month" (Shemot 19) which is clear exposure which cannot be ignored. And both answers are correct in my eyes.

This Week in Israeli History: 28 Iyar, 1904 Rabbi Kook Makes Aliyah

Yisroel Meir Rosenzweig

28 Iyar is Sunday

Made Aliyah to the Holy Land on 28 Iyar 5664 (1904). Went up to Yerushalayim on 3 Elul 5679 (1918). Rose to Heaven on 3 Elul 5695 (1935).

These simple words are inscribed upon Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook's tombstone on the Mount of Olives. While they don't appear to detail any of Rabbi Kook's tremendous accomplishments, they do speak to the essence of his character. His focus in life was to always climb upwards, both physically and spiritual. The fruits of his growth made an indelible impact on modern Jewish life in and out of Israel.

After serving as Rabbi of several towns in Europe, Rav Kook was invited to serve as the Rabbi of Jaffa and its surrounding areas. Upon accepting the offer, he and his family made Aliyah on the 28th of Iyyar, beginning a period of incredible productivity. Until this point, Rabbi Kook's unique philosophy had been in its fledgling stages, and now

it could truly flourish. Fueled by the inspiration that he found in Israel, Rabbi Kook's literary accomplishments during his time in Jaffa include the opening sections of *Orot HaTeshuvah*, as well as his important treatise on the laws of Shemitah, *Shabbat Ha'Aretz*.

The newspaper, *Hashkafah* from May 19, 1904 printed a short portrayal of the community's reception of Rabbi Kook on his first Shabbat in Jaffa. He is described as having, "[L]eft a very good impression upon the community being addressed, for the Rabbi spoke in a clear, pure Hebrew. The Sefardim also understood his words and enjoyed them." In another article, the writer concludes, "We hope that, in his days, peace comes and rests upon our city." Rabbi Kook's lasting legacy should indeed be a source of peace in our days as well.

To access the "*Hashkafah*" articles in their original, please see <http://goo.gl/stjqxv> and <http://goo.gl/OEvw9W>.

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Weekly Highlights: May 16 – May 22 / 27 Iyar – 4 Sivan

Time	Speaker	Topic	Location	Special Notes
שבת May 15-16				
After Hashkamah	Yisroel Meir Rosenzweig	Is there a berachah on Kiddush Hashem?	Clanton Park	
5:30 PM	R' David Ely Grundland	Parent-Child Learning	Shaarei Shomayim	
5:30 PM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Good Fences Make Good Neighbours	BAYT	<i>Women's Shiur</i>
Before Pirkei Avot	R' Josh Gutenberg	Daf Yomi	BAYT	<i>Rabbi's Classroom</i>
After minchah	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Gemara Avodah Zarah: Aphrodite's Bath?	BAYT	<i>West Wing Library</i>
Sun. May 17	Yom Yerushalayim			
8:30 AM	Special Minyan for Yom Yerushalayim At Zichron Yisroel of the AHS, 300 Atkinson Ave, Thornhill			
8:45 AM	R' Josh Gutenberg	Contemporary Halachah: Starting Shabbat Early	BAYT	<i>Third floor</i>
9:15 AM	R' Shalom Krell	Kuzari	Zichron Yisroel	With light breakfast
Tues. May 19				
1:30 PM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Book of Job: G-d as Enemy	Shaarei Shomayim	
Wed. May 20	Rosh Chodesh Sivan			
8:15 PM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Is There a Mitzvah of Getting a Job?	BAYT	Thornhill B'Yachad Night of Learning
Thu. May 21				
1:30 PM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	The Book of Yehoshua	49 Michael Ct. Thornhill	Not this week
Fri. May 22				
10:30 AM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Advanced Shemitah	Yeshivat Or Chaim	Not this week

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