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Behar-Bechukotai 5783

By Word, On Parchment, In Stone: An Appreciation of Dr. Samuel Belkin z"l

Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm z"l (Originally delivered May 22, 1976)

Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, the founder of HaBaD Hasidism, in his great work Likkutei Torah (to this week's Sidra), tell us that the divine revelation is transmitted in three different ways: by means of the Oral Law, תורה שבעל פה; by means of the Written Law, תורה שבכתב; and by means of חקיקה or engraving, such as the engraving on the לוחות or Tablets. From the latter form we derive the word which gives its name to this Sidra, בחוקותי, because the חוקה or law was that which was engraved on the Tablets.

Hence, Torah is taught by word, on parchment, and in stone.

But if this is true for divine teaching, it is true as well for human education or teaching. For the teacher is one who, by profession, emulates God, he realizes the principle of והלכת בדרכיו or imitatio Dei. Just as God is a Teacher -- המלמד תורה לעמו ישראל -- so is the human educator. Thus too, God tells us מה אני בחינם אף אתם בחינם, "even as I teach Torah without accepting any remuneration, so must you." And the Rabbis taught us יהא מורא רבך כמורא שמים, you must fear or reverence your teacher even as you fear or reverence Heaven itself.

This morning I wish to follow the rubric of these three ways -- by word, on parchment, in stone -- to describe briefly one of the greatest educators of our times, my late, revered, and beloved teacher, Dr. Samuel Belkin, of blessed memory. His students have decided to dedicate this Shabbat, the first one after the thirty-day period of mourning has ended, to his memory.

His תורה שבעל פה, his oral law, consisted not only of his sheurim or lectures -- and they were all models of clarity and systematism as well as brilliant -- but of his personality as well: those personal, human qualities that have to be experienced in order to be appreciated.

As a teacher, he was a paragon of sweetness and

generosity. I regard it as a great privilege that I was able to be his student for one year, the last year that he taught a class. His interest extended to every aspect of our lives, not only the intellectual and the spiritual, but the physical and material as well.

There were certain paradoxes that seemed to be inherent in his complex character and produced a tension of opposites. Thus, he had a great deal of toughness in his exercise of leadership, but he was extremely tender. He was a man that could be forceful if need be, yet he was fundamentally very shy. As much as he was outgoing in public, he was a reserved and a very private individual. He had a public posture, but a rich inner life that very few people knew of.

Through it all, he had enormous charm, endless courage, what he referred to as "divine optimism," and a capacity for growth. He was a very loyal man, who never betrayed a colleague, a student, or a friend.

Finally, his תורה שבעל פה included a capacity for accelerated living. I suspect that those who so often wished him, "may you live to 120 years," had their prayers vindicated in a manner of speaking: he crammed 120 years into barely 65! Ordained at 17, the youngest president of a college in this country when he was in his early thirty's, he worked for his beloved institution until the very last minute -- on his very death-bed he worried about Yeshiva. For the great majority of his life, he was a fully functioning adult -- he matured early, and he kept young and active and vital to the very end.

His חקיקה, his "engraving on the tablets," symbolized his great public and practical achievements. R. Shneur Zalman says that the difference between the written law and the engraving on the tablets is this, that the former is דיין על גבי קלף, ink on parchment, whereas the latter means the words are engraved in the stone itself. Ink may adhere very well to

the parchment, but ultimately the ink and the parchment remain two separate substances, whereas the letters engraved into stone are organically united in it; there is only one substance, not two.

Like Moses cutting God's word into stone, Dr. Belkin placed stone upon stone and brick upon brick to provide a place for God's word, Torah.

He suffered for Yeshiva University, sacrificed for it, supported it, led it, built it. He was vitally concerned with every facet and aspect of this great school. His ideas and values and insights are carved into the university itself, in every brick and every stone — and in the many minds and hearts of those who passed through its portals.

The name of Samuel Belkin is indelibly and organically united with that of Yeshiva University — forever.

His תורה שבכתב, his written law, are his books and articles and monographs, the repository of his masterful scholarly insights. He was an expert in many fields — in Halakhah, as a teacher of Talmud; as an authority in Hellenistic literature, in Midrash, and in Philo.

His scholarly works included Philo and the Oral Law, which was his doctoral thesis; a number of articles on Philo and Midrash and Zohar; In His Image — a splendid popular book on the philosophy of Halakhah which all of us should read; and popular articles on Jewish education and general education as well.

I would like to offer briefly some of the highlights and insights from his תורה שבכתב, his written law, so that those of us who know his “tablets,” i.e., Yeshiva University, and knew him personally — his “oral law” — should have some taste as well of his “written law.”

In a short work published about 20 years ago, entitled, The Philosophy of Purpose, he made a very important distinction between “purpose” and “reason.” There is a great literature about טעמי המצוות, the “reasons for the commandments.” It is a term we usually use when we want to invoke some authority for trying to explain the mitzvot in order to attract people into Judaism. Dr. Belkin, however, taught that what is important is the purpose of the commandments, not the reasons. The reasons why God commanded something or forbade something — reasons that usually refer to conditions which were current at the time of the commandment or shortly before that — are primarily of interest to antiquarians, anthropologists, or ancient historians. Reasons can become obsolescent, yet the mitzvot continue. Therefore, what is important is the purpose of the commandments. Every commandment has

as its purpose some ennoblement of the individual Jew, of the Jewish community, of the world. The reasons for commandments may tickle our curiosity, but they have little to do with our existential situations. The purposes of the commandments, however, are crucial to our lives. If we know the purpose, and fulfill it — we have lived; otherwise, our lives are wasted.

Dr. Belkin offered an interesting description of the Jewish conception of the State as, “a Democratic Theocracy.” By “Theocracy,” he meant not what the term indicates in its modern sense, i.e., a government ruled by priests or a hierarchy, but in the sense first used by Josephus — that the ultimate authority of the people is not the state or the community, or even the people themselves, but the sovereignty of God. In this sense, Judaism is a Theocracy. It is “Democratic,” because Judaism teaches the infinite worth of the human being. In Judaism, the value of Demos derives from Theos.

Dr. Belkin disagreed with many scholars of the historical school who see in the controversies between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, as well as in the controversies amongst the Tannaim, social and economic and political causes. While these may have played a role, Dr. Belkin is profoundly convinced that the major differences lie in differing religious perceptions and fundamental philosophical attitudes.

Permit me to cite one example. The Sadducees held that a master is responsible for damages incurred by his slaves. The reason they gave is this: if a man is responsible for damages incurred by his animals, such as an ox, though he is not responsible for the moral tone of the animal's life, then certainly he is responsible for his slave's torts, because he is responsible for the observance of the mitzvot by the slaves. The Pharisees' answer to this was: No! There is a fundamental difference between the two categories. Animals have no minds of their own, whereas slaves do.

Objectively viewed, it would seem that the Sadducees have compelling logic on their side. Given the system of slavery, if a slave is my real property, then I should be responsible for the damages he inflicts.

Here is an example where economic determinism makes no sense. The Pharisees were poorer than the Sadducees. If there were slave-holders, it was amongst the Sadducees that most of them would be found. Yet in this law, it would seem that the Pharisees rather than the Sadducees sided with the slave-owner, since they did not require him to pay the bill for the damages inflicted by the slaves.

However, Dr. Belkin points out that this Halakhah issues from different philosophical orientations. The Pharisees advocated the sacredness of the human personality. A slave has a mind of his own, and therefore a responsibility of his own. “No human being can so completely become the property of another so as to lose all his individuality.” The absolute ownership of a human being is alien to the Pharisees’ philosophy, to the Rabbis’ concept of the dignity of man. Therefore too, the slave is responsible himself for his own observance of the commandments; and one who kills even a pagan slave, an עבד כנעני, is guilty of a capital crime.

These are only two or three minor points from his rather extensive writings.

What a creative mind Dr. Belkin had! How much more he could have done were it not for all the onerous burdens he bore for the entire community, for his self-sacrifice in teaching thousands of others.

The Talmud (in Kiddushin) tells us that during the Hadrianic persecutions, the Rabbis gathered in Lydda were of two minds concerning תלמוד ומעשה איזה עדיף, which is more important, study or practice. Whatever may be the nuances of this controversy, Dr. Belkin’s words about the differences in opinion are so very much applicable to his own career and life:

Living in a society in which scholarship was a prerequisite for practical contributions to the well-being of the community, many a scholar in ancient times must have faced this problem. Should he isolate himself in an ivory tower and dedicate his entire life to the study of the Torah or should he apply his knowledge to public service?”

This dilemma never gave him any rest. I remember one of my very last conversations with him, when he told me that he was looking forward to retirement, so that he could get back to “this” -- pointing to a large number of books and papers piled up on the floor -- and make a contribution to scholarship that he thought only he could do. Alas, that joy was not to be his, and the benefit of the fruit of his research was not to be ours!

This afternoon, we shall read in the fifth chapter of Avot, the concluding words, לפום צערא אגרא, “according to the pain is the reward.” That is so if we read the last word as Agra, which means “reward.” But the word can also be read Igra, “high places.”

God alone will grant him his reward, his Agra, for all the pain he endured in this life on behalf of Torah and Israel. But for us, we must acknowledge that he reached the Igra, the very heights of Jewish life. He attained genuine greatness, and placed all of us in his debt. It caused him much צער, pain, to attain this Igra, high place. And it causes us much pain to know that we have lost him from the top of the mountain; there is a void, an emptiness at the summit of our lives.

What he achieved and taught and was, will remain an inspiration for generations not only by word, on parchment, and in stone -- but in the hearts and souls and minds of countless students and friends and ordinary Jews whose Jewish posterity and the Jewish posterity of their children and grandchildren will now be more assured thanks to him.

יהא זכרו ברוך, may his memory be a blessing.

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This Land is My Land, This Land is Your Land

Rabbi Joshua (The Hoffer) Hoffman z"l

Parshas Behar begins with a command to observe the laws of shemittah, the sabbatical year, when we are commanded not to work our fields in Eretz Yisroel, in recognition that it belongs to God. The Torah tells us that God told these laws to Moshe at Mt. Sinai. Rashi cites the midrash which asks, why are the laws of shemittah, specifically, connected to Mt. Sinai? The midrash answers that this connection was made in order to teach us that just as the laws of shemittah were in all their details were given at Sinai, so, too, were all the laws of the Torah given, with all their details, at Sinai. We need to understand, however,

why shemittah is used as the prototype for the rest of the Torah. Rabbi Moshe Sofer, known as the Chasam Sofer, explained that leaving the land fallow for a year requires a great deal of faith and trust in God, and these elements are fundamental to observance of the Torah, in general. I would like to offer an alternative explanation to the connection between shemittah and the Torah as a whole, based on an analysis of the ideological underpinnings of the laws of shemittah.

The Sefer haChinuch writes that the purpose of the mitzvah of shemittah is to remind us that God created the

world in six days and rested on the seventh day. Ramban writes that just as Shabbos serves as a reminder of the creation during the other six days, so too does shemittah serve as a reminder of creation in terms of the years that the world exists. Rabbi Aharon Dovid Goldberg, in his Shiras Dovid to parshas Behar, after citing the comments of the Chinuch and the Ramban, notes that Rashi, in the beginning of his commentary to the Torah, writes that our claim to Eretz Yisroel is based on our recognition of the fact that God created the world, and can give it to whomever He wishes. It was, indeed, because the nation ceased observing the laws of shemittah that they were exiled, as we read in parshas Bechukosai. The Torah there, after describing the travails that the nation will go through in its exile, concludes, “then the land will appease its shemittah years” (Vayikra 26:34).

Actually, however, there is an additional reason for the exile, which is mentioned at the very beginning of the section which foretells it. Parshas Bechukosai begins by saying, “If you will walk in My statutes and observe My commandments and perform them, then I will provide your rains in their time, and the land will give its produce, etc.” (Vayikra 26:3-4). Later, we are told that if we do not follow this formula, we will be punished, and, eventually exiled from the land. Rashi writes that when the Torah says, “If you will walk in my statutes,” it refers to laboring in Torah study in order to perform the mitzvos, as mentioned in the continuation of the verse. Thus, failure to engage in Torah study properly leads to a lack of observance, and, eventually, to exile. Rabbi Shlomo Ephraim of Lunshitz, author of the famed commentary Keli Yakar, writes, in his lesser known commentary, Sifsei Da’as, that there are a number of sources that point to neglect of Torah study as a cause of exile. Neglect of Torah study, in fact, leads to a neglect of Torah observance, as Rashi points out, so that it was really a neglect of all the mitzvos which caused exile. However, the Torah explicitly points to the neglect of shemittah as the cause of exile. How, then, can we reconcile the sources which say that neglect of shemittah causes exile, with the sources that point to a neglect of Torah in general, and consequently lack of mitzvoh observance in general, as the cause of exile? I believe that a closer look at Rashi in the beginning of parshas Bereishis can provide us with an answer.

Rashi’s comment that our claim to Eretz Yisroel is based on our recognition of God as the Creator is taken from a midrash, in answer to a question of Rav Yitzchok.

Why, he asks, does the Torah begin with the book of Bereishis, which records the creation of the world and the subsequent events in the lives of the first human beings, and, later, of the forefathers? The Torah is, after all, a book of divine instruction for the Jewish people, and should have begun with God’s command of the first mitzvoh to the Jewish people as a collective. The midrash answers that the accounts in the book of Bereishis are meant to establish the validity of the Jewish people’s claim to the land of Israel, in that God created the world and can give the land to whom he wishes. Thus, although He originally gave the land to the people of Canaan, He later took it from them and gave it to the nation of Israel. While the message carried in this answer is important, it is difficult to see how this idea resolves the original question. We still need to understand the connection between the accounts recorded in the book of Bereishis and the fundamental purpose of the Torah, which is to teach us the mitzvos that we must perform. I would like to present two explanations of how this answer does, in fact, explain that connection, and then demonstrate how these two explanations merge into one.

The Ramban, in his commentary to parshas Acharei Mos, writes that the mitzvos are meant to be performed mainly in the land of Israel. This applies, according to the Ramban, not only to agricultural mitzvos such as terumah and ma’aser which relate specifically to the soil of Eretz Yisroel, but even to mitzvos such as tefillin and tzitzis, which are mitzvos that relate primarily to the person. Rabbi Eliyohu Meir Bloch explained that even though, in turns of our obligation to perform these mitzvos, there is no difference between the land of Israel and the lands outside of it, in terms of the effect that the mitzvos have on those who perform them there is a difference. Since God’s presence is more intense and evident in Eretz Yisroel, the effect that the mitzvos performed there have upon us is also greater. Thus, since all the mitzvos are enhanced when performed in Eretz Yisroel, it seems appropriate that before the mitzvos are commanded to the Jewish people, its claim to the land, which is the natural place for those mitzvos to be performed, be clarified.

Another explanation, found in the Keli Yakar, is that our claim to Eretz Yisroel needs to be clarified because otherwise the nations of the world would challenge the Torah itself. How, they could claim, can Moshe tell the Jews in Egypt to avoid theft and take a lamb of their own to serve as the Passover sacrifice, when He did not care that the Israelites were going to rob other nations of their land?

In order to show that God's laws are based on justice, the claim of the people to the land needed to be clarified and firmly established. For this reason, the Torah begins with the book of Bereishis to demonstrate that the land of Israel does, indeed, belong to the Israelite nation.

I believe that the two answers we have presented, one based on the Ramban, and one taken from the Keli Yakar, are complementary to each other. Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, of blessed memory, has pointed out that any unauthorized use of God's world on our part constitutes theft. God created the world, and it belongs to Him. Man is allowed to make use of that world only on the condition that he follow God's rules in doing so. If man sins, then his use of the world constitutes theft. The Torah, then, is the Jewish people's guide to the proper use of God's universe, instructing them how to avoid any misappropriation of it. Within this context, it is important to demonstrate that the Jewish people has not misappropriated the land of Israel, the optimum location for the performance of the

mitzvos. That is why the Torah begins with an account of the creation of the world and the subsequent events, which eventually led to God's taking the land back from the Canaanites and giving it to the Jewish nation (for more on this topic, see *Netvort to Bereishis, 5760*, available at Torahheights.com).

Based on our explanation of Rashi in Bereishis, we can understand that neglect of the mitzvoh of shemittah is symptomatic of a refusal to recognize God as Creator and owner of the universe, which is the underpinning of all the commandments of the Torah. The nation's neglect of the shemittah laws was thus symptomatic of a larger neglect of the entire Torah, which led to exile. Therefore, in the beginning of parshas Behar, when the Torah presents us with the laws of shemittah, we are told that they were given on Mt. Sinai, indicating that all of the mitzvos were given there, because the concept underlying the mitzvos of shemittah are at the core of the entire Torah.

What is Life Worth?

Dr. Erica Brown

Mr. Feinberg, my husband was a fireman and died a hero at the World Trade Center. Why are you giving me less money than the banker who represented Enron? Why are you demeaning the memory of my husband?" This was the tragic question of a widow trying to figure out her life after 9/11 and understand the complex calculations made by Kenneth R. Feinberg, the special master of the government's compensation fund. He shared this dilemma and many other difficult challenges in his fascinating book, *What Is Life Worth?: The Inside Story of the 9/11 Fund and Its Effort to Compensate the Victims of September 11th*.

Feinberg did not sugarcoat the personal attacks leveled at him for doing an unenviable job. He writes about having the capacity to "stand up to criticism and stress, and to labor effectively in a very emotional vineyard..." In this kind of leadership, many misunderstand the delicate nature of the work and the temperament require: "empathy and sensitivity to the plight of those singled out for special consideration; confidence and firmness towards critics." He understood the profound despair behind the criticisms: "Life's unfairness is usually the real source of their anger. The nature of the compensation received is secondary."

What interests us and ties the compensation fund to this week's double Torah reading, Behar-Behukotai, is the attempt to put a valuation on individual lives. There's an inherent unfairness and detached and impersonal objectification to an exercise that is by nature highly personal. Feinberg admits that: "It's never fair to put a price on any life, but we do it all the time, as Feinberg said in a television interview: "Juries every day in New York, every village and hamlet in this country, listen to the evidence and then place a value on an injury, on a death. It is the American way of compensating victims."

In Jewish law, one of the ways we measure a life financially is through compensation for injury. "One who injures another is liable to pay compensation for that injury through five types of indemnity: He must pay for damage, for pain, for medical costs, for loss of livelihood, and for humiliation" (BT *Bava Kama* 83b). It is not enough to pay someone's medical bills. If you have injured another, you are obligated to cover the cost of physical pain that may far outlive whatever medical procedure one has to endure. There is loss of revenue from not working during convalescence. There is also the cost of psychological harm. The Talmud uses the example of one person slapping

another in the face in public. There may be no medical harm, enduring pain, or loss of income, but the humiliation may be substantial. These costs are far from easy to determine.

In our *parsha*, however, the valuation (*erekh*) of individuals is for a different purpose, not as compensation for the dead but as a tool to give *tzedaka*, charity. In Leviticus 27:1-2, we read, “God spoke to Moses, saying: Speak to the Israelite people and say to them: When any party explicitly vows to the equivalent for a human being,” Rashi, citing both a midrash and the Talmud, explains that there were fixed monetary valuations for someone who wanted to give money to the Sanctuary as if to communicate metaphorically that the life of the Temple is dependent on the lives of those who benefit from it.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch explains that these freewill offerings come down to “*erekh*,” a word used in modern Hebrew for ‘worth’ or ‘value.’ This is not only monetary in meaning but communicates the values we hold. Rabbi Hirsch states that we place one value – our individual lives – next to another value – the estimation of our worth as a person in relationship to the holiest of places. We do not measure every single life differently, even though we believe in the singularity of each human life. Rather, “This value is given as a fixed one, it has absolutely nothing to do with physical, spiritual, intellectual, moral or social qualities...”

When valuations are fixed, some people who cannot afford to give the set amount would not be able to contribute. Thus, the Torah continues: “But if one cannot

afford the equivalent, that person shall be presented before the priest, and the priest shall make an assessment; the priest shall make the assessment according to what the vower can afford,” (Lev. 27:8). Rashi here explains, based upon the Talmudic volume dedicated to this form of charity (BT *Arakhin* 23b) that the priest works with the donor so that he can also feel the sense of belonging that comes with contributing to this remarkable spiritual center while making sure that he still has “a bed, mattress and pillow, and the tools necessary for his trade.” Additionally, the Talmud discusses what happens if a person made this vow when he was poor, became wealthy, and then became poor again. Does his commitment change?

These Talmudic cases of injury and charity, like those in the 9/11 victim compensation fund, occupy the complicated space between establishing objective standards that will never be fully just with the subjectivity of one’s individual financial and social standing. The process will always be inherently flawed because we can never measure human worth with accuracy. And most of the time, we don’t have to. But, every once in a while, we have to, and it requires clarity, strength of character, and lots of time. It takes moral leadership. As we close the book of Leviticus, we are asked to personalize the Temple and its rituals by asking what we are willing to give to God to show what we value.

How would your charitable giving change if you assessed your personal worth in relation to the worth of what you are giving to?

The Journey and the Destination

Rabbi Assaf Bednarsh (Transcribed and adapted by a talmid from a shiur given in the Gruss Kollel on May 23, 2019)

At the beginning of this week’s Parsha, the Torah tells us, *Im bechukosai teileichu ve-es mitzvosai tishmeru va-asisem osam*. And Rashi famously comments: If *mitzvosai tishmeru va-asisem osam* already includes doing all the mitzvos, what does Torah add by the words *bechukosai teileichu*? She-tihyu ameilim ba-Torah—you should work hard in Torah. And what is unique about being *amel* in Torah? The Ohr ha-Chaim ha-Kadosh here explains that one might have thought it’s a matter of results—that you must amass a certain number of facts to know Torah and not to be ignorant. And Rashi

is telling you that is not true. *Ameilus* in Torah means that you must keep learning repeatedly, just for the experience of learning Torah. And every time you learn something you should be excited as if it is *chadash be-eynecha*. Additionally, he quotes Midrash Rabba that Hashem decreed that people would learn Torah and forget so that they would always have excitement about learning. If you would remember everything you learned, eventually you would get bored—you would know everything, get sick of it, and wouldn’t be excited to learn anymore. Fascinatingly, according to this Midrash Rabba, it is more important for

Hashem that we should be excited about the Torah—even if we will end up learning less overall—and not necessarily how much we know. The experience of learning Torah, the excitement, and getting into learning is critical.

There is a famous vort of the Chafetz Chaim on the line *Anu ameilim ve-heim ameilim, Anu ameilim u-mekablim sechar, ve-heim ameilim ve-einam mekablim sechar* that we say at a siyim. He explains: We work, and they work. We work and get sechar, and they work, and they don't get sechar. What does that mean that they work and don't get sechar? We work and get sechar. We work in learning, and we get sechar in Olam ha-Bo. And when other people work at a business or wherever else, they also get sechar—a different type of sechar—they get paid in dollars and cents in Olam ha-Zeh. But how can we say that they don't get sechar at all? So the Chafetz Chaim says you have to be medayek in the lashon. Out there, in the business world, if you succeed, you make money, and if you do not, you don't make money. *Anu ameilim u-mekablim sechar*—we learn Torah and receive the reward—whether we know the Torah, get the peshat, become a baki be-kol ha-Torah kulah, or not. We get sechar for the ameilus. But *heim ameilim ve-einam mekablim sechar*. In the business world, you get sechar for results, but you don't get paid just for the effort—if it consistently fails to deliver results. If you do everything right in business and work your tail off, yet the deal somehow goes sour, or you are at the wrong place at the wrong time, you get no sechar at all. You could end up losing the money you started with. And while we get sechar just for ameilus, they don't. And this is the explanation of

the Ohr ha-Chaim ha-Kadosh. Of course, Hashem wants us to know Torah. But, more than His desire for us to know it, He wants us to have the experience of learning Torah. Just the encounter with Torah, with Dvar Hashem, being meshabed ourselves to it and being excited, is even more important than the Torah knowledge. He then takes it in a slightly different direction. Why does Torah use the lashon of chok (as in something beyond our understanding) in the word be-chukosai to refer to ameilus? And he replies: Because we can't logically explain why the experience of learning is so powerful. It's a chok that we don't necessarily understand. We don't comprehend how wonderful Torah is. We don't understand the effect that Torah has on someone. It's a chok that the process of learning Torah is even more important than knowing it at the end.

We can add another layer of meaning to the Ohr ha-Chaim ha-Kadosh. Chok is from the lashon *chakika*—engraving. You want to know what engraves something on your heart? Is it just knowing Torah? It certainly does. But more so, when I get into it and I am excited to learn, when I have an experience of encounter and struggle, going back and forth, and the consequent geshmak of learning, that etches a deep impression in my heart. And the effect of Torah on us is not whether we get a hundred on a bechina or become a Gadol ha-Dor but whether we end up feeling the sweetness and power of Torah in our hearts—which changes us and makes us into different kind of people, Bnei Torah. That is what's most important to Hashem. Shabbat Shalom.

Three Blessings for the Soul

Rabbi Hershel Reichman

The parsha begins by telling us how to earn a string of blessings. “*Im bechukosai teileichu v'es mitzvosai timshmeru va'asisem osam*. If you walk in My statutes, and observe My commandments and perform them” (Vayikra 26:3). For the Jewish People to achieve the blessings, we are required to do three things: 1) walk in God's statutes, 2) observe the commandments, and 3) do them. What is the meaning of these three things?

On the words *bechukosai teileichu*, Rashi writes, “*Shetihyu ameilim baTorah*. You must toil in Torah.” This involves more than just knowing what the Torah says; it means investing time and effort studying the Torah.

Mitzvosai tishmeru means, “Observe My mitzvos.” The Toras Kohanim says that this also refers to Torah study. Rashi elsewhere, commenting on the word *ushmartem* (Devarim 4:6), explains that the word refers to mishna, meaning to study the Torah. What do these two imperatives of Torah study entail?

There are indeed two parts of Torah learning. The first part is *yegi'a*, the effort and process of learning Torah. This is *laleches*, to walk towards knowledge of the Torah. Then there is actually knowing the Torah and not forgetting it. We have to put in the hours and effort in learning the Torah, and then we have to make sure that we don't forget

it. This second stage is to know what the Torah is teaching us and to protect it within ourselves, to remember what it says—*lishmor*.

Stage three involves action, *va'asisem osam*. We must actually perform the mitzvos and live a Torah lifestyle. These are the three things mentioned in this pasuk. Work hard to study, protect your Torah knowledge and review it, and then practice the knowledge you have accrued.

When we study Torah, know Torah, and practice Torah, we will receive all of the blessings of Hashem.

The Challenge of Balance

This seems to be such an obvious three-step process. One wonders why so many people just don't do it! I don't know how to explain this phenomenon. But many people seem to have a disconnect from the process. Many people say, "I practice Torah, I do the mitzvos, but I don't have to study." Others study but may not practice. Others still study Torah but don't review it to keep it in their minds.

The yeitzer hara is always trying to throw us off the good and proper path. Even people who are fulfilling two of these three stages can still give in to the rationalizations of the yeitzer. I know some people who spend a lot of time studying, but they don't review, because it is not as exciting as first-time study. But since they never review, they end up not knowing so much—even though they spend so much time studying! Others are busy doing chesed and other good deeds, and say they don't have enough time to learn. This is also a mistake. We must do all three. This is our responsibility. We have to achieve a proper balance. We cannot do just one or two stages of Torah life and ignore the indivisible three-part package.

The Torah doesn't say exactly what the balance is between these three. A person needs a spiritual guide, a rabbi or teacher, to ask how to come up with the correct balance. But no matter how we balance them, we nevertheless must study, know, and practice. We have to do all three.

Three Levels of Soul

The Shem Mishmuel explains that the three concepts mentioned in this first verse of the parsha relate to the three aspects of the human soul. We have mentioned this concept before, as the Shem Mishmuel often refers to the triplicate level of the human soul. This is a fundamental point of Kabbala and has also been developed by many Chassidic thinkers.

We are all aware of the three levels of the soul—nefesh,

ruach, and neshama. We all feel our nefesh, our biological soul. We feel that we are alive. We breathe and receive stimulation through our five senses. We feel our ruach, the emotional aspect of our lives. We experience anger, love, hate, excitement, joy, and disappointment.

Higher still is our neshama, our intellect and logic, and the spiritual experiences we go through as God's created people with our divine spark.

The Shem Mishmuel explains that the three responsibilities—to study, know, and practice Torah—refer to the three levels of the Jewish soul. Practicing Torah clearly refers to the physical experience, the nefesh. We place tefillin on our arms and heads, eat matza on Pesach, rest on Shabbos, drink kiddush wine, give charity, help the poor, and visit the sick. All of these mitzvos are done primarily with our physical side, the biological experience, with our nefesh.

The Holiness of Life

The body is an important part of our religious experience. We must do mitzvos with it. This is a fundamental difference between Judaism and Christianity. Judaism believes that the body is a home for holiness. My fingers, hands, stomach, head, eyes, and ears are holy vessels for God's presence.

We Jews do not think of the body as abhorrent, disgusting, and terrible. Some Christian sects and eastern religions take this perspective. For us, getting married and having children are important mitzvos. So are the physical activities of helping the sick and poor. The body is a source of holiness.

This is why Judaism puts such a strong emphasis on the preservation of biological life itself. Even if a person is unconscious and on life support, there is a mitzva to keep him or her alive for even one more second. We can even desecrate Shabbos to extend the life of someone who is on life support. We recognize physical life as holy, as a Godly expression of the holy soul that Hashem Himself breathed into a human body. The body is the receptacle of the tzelem Elokim, the holy divine image that God breathed into man and woman. As long as a man can take a breath, his very body is holy; he is a vessel for the presence of the holy spirit of Hashem.

Recently, sociologists and psychologists conducted a survey of countries around the world. To their surprise, they found that Jews love life more than any other group in the world. We have the lowest rate of suicide coupled with

quite a high birthrate. We have a tremendous love of life. We appreciate life. This is a core Jewish attitude.

Each individual life is priceless. Chazal say (Sanhedrin 37a) that man was created as an individual, as a single Adam. This teaches us that every single person is like an entire world. God created the whole world just for the individual, for Adam, and similarly for each and every one of us.

God's Most Precious Desire

The Torah says that good deeds that the body does are God's most precious desire. He wants us to do good deeds. In God's estimation, they make a huge difference. Other religions say that deeds are ultimately meaningless. The Torah teaches that good deeds are the primary justification and the true reason for human beings having a physical body. Hashem gave us a body to live in this world, even with the downsides of physical life. He wants us to rectify and to sanctify the body and our entire physical experience.

This was Rambam's great disagreement with Aristotle. Aristotle wrote that the intellectual side of the human being is noble and dignified, but the physical side is ignoble and animalistic. In writing the laws of the Torah, Rambam emphasizes the importance of proper physical actions. The human being has the potential and obligation to turn the physical side of life from something possibly degrading and disgusting into something noble and holy. This is the concept of *va'asisem osam*, to fix and rectify the nefesh, the biological side of life.

Emotional Passion for Torah

The second level of the soul is expressed in the emotions of people, in our ruach. This is the level that requires *ameilus baTorah*, investing time and effort in studying the Torah. This is an emotional investment. Time is precious, and study requires focus. It is an emotional commitment to love and learn Torah.

We always have to ask ourselves the question of what to do with our time. If I am a free person, I decide on my own what to do with my time. I can decide to play games in my spare time. If I like to make money, I can put my time into making money. The Torah says we should put our effort and time into the study of Torah.

This has to be the activity that gives each of us the most emotional pleasure. It should be what we want to do with our spare time. Traditionally, the Jewish People, especially the men, spent their spare time learning Torah.

Today, women also invest a lot of time and effort into Torah study. Our sociological situation has changed. We have seminaries and shiurim dedicated to and designed especially for women. This study of Torah requires time.

For those of you who are not rabbis or teachers of Torah, you have many other responsibilities. You may be a professional, a housewife, a lawyer, or a doctor. You are busy. However, you should take the time, whether it's one hour a week or five hours a week, and put it into learning Torah. You should be *ameil baTorah*. You thus make the correct decision to emphasize Torah study. This is because you decide that you do like it. Torah study gives you pleasure. This spiritual pleasure effects a *tikkun of the ruach*, a rectification of your emotional spirit. This comes through putting time and energy into Torah study.

Hashem has given us the gift, privilege, and responsibility of Torah study. We must be *ameilim baTorah*. We must put time and effort, struggle, sacrifice, and investment of time into the study of Torah. This is the expression and fulfillment of our emotional soul, our ruach.

Intellectual Achievement

Finally, our *neshama*, the intellect, is the highest level of our soul that we are aware of on a daily basis. Our *neshama* is perfected through the knowledge of Torah. The very purpose of the creation of our intellect is for us to have this knowledge, to know the words, concepts, and depths of Torah thought. This knowledge provides rectification for the *neshama*, the highest level of our soul.

This is why the Torah says that in order to receive the blessings, we have to make the commitment to Torah. We must put time and effort into Torah, as the Torah instructs us, and thereby fix our ruach. We must know the Torah and thereby fix our intellect and *neshama*. Finally, we must do the mitzvos and fix our nefesh.

Triplicate Blessings

The Shem Mishmuel explains that the Torah promises us three kinds of blessings for doing these three things. It states, "I will give you rain in the proper time. The land and trees will give produce and fruit, vintage and sowing. You will eat bread and be satiated. You will have peace in the land. You will lie down and no one will frighten you. You will not fear wild beasts nor the sword in your land. You will pursue your enemies, and they will fall by the sword. I will turn My attention to you. I will make you fruitful, giving you many children. I will build My Sanctuary

among you. I will not reject you, and I will walk among you” (Vayikra 26:4–12).

Physical blessings speak of bounty, namely, that the Land of Israel will provide enough produce and you will feel satiated while enjoying the food. Your well-being will be assured, and you will thrive physically. The next set of blessings refer to emotional peace. You will not fear wild animals nor the attacks of the enemy. You will dwell in harmony. The third set of blessings is that God’s presence and His Temple will be among us. We will feel that He took us out of Egypt and guides us in the present time.

These three kinds of blessings refer to the three levels of our soul. The first set of blessings relates to physical bounty. Blessings of food, children, and life all refer to the physical dimension of our being. In the words of the Gemara (Mo’eid Katan 28a), all of us desire *bnei, chayei, u’mezonei*, children, good health, and physical comfort. If we do the mitzvos, when we do with our bodies what we are supposed to do in our physical experience, then God will bless us with those physical blessings. We will have life, food, income, children, and families. We will have these three blessings of the nefesh in return for doing mitzvos with our nefesh.

When we have passion for Torah and put our spare time into its study, then God will give us the blessings of emotional tranquility. There won’t be wars in Israel. We won’t fear sudden attacks or tragedies. If God doesn’t protect people, nature can be devastating, God forbid, as we have seen in recent years. The Torah says that we will have emotional tranquility. We won’t have to fear terrorist attacks. Make yourself busy in Torah study, invest emotionally in Torah. Focus your love and pleasure in Torah study. You will then discover emotional tranquility. You will have protection from attacks of enemies—you will have protection even if nature itself rises up to hurt you. God will protect you. This is in the merit of struggling and investing our emotions in the Torah.

Fixing Our Very Souls

When we know Torah, we rectify our neshama, fixing our highest soul level, the intellectual soul. When we know Torah, Hashem will bless us with His holy presence. What is the greatest level of the Jewish intellect? To know God, as the prophet Yirmiyahu said: “*Haskeil v’yadoa osi*. Study and know Me” (Yirmiyahu 9:23). The knowledge of Torah is itself knowledge of God. It is a way for man and woman to discover and to know their Creator. We can have a

relationship with, cling to, and feel Him in every step of our lives. This is why Hashem says, “If you know the Torah, I will walk among you, I will be your God, I will let My sanctuary be among you.” Hashem resides inside every single Jew who knows Torah.

We know that Torah scholars have a special connection with Hashem. They are the chariot of Hashem’s presence in this world.

This is the third level of blessing. If we know Torah, thus perfecting our intellectual level, we will be together with Hashem. He will reside together with us in our neshama, in our holy soul, and we will feel His holy presence inside and around us.

The Shem Mishmuel explains that we focus on these three levels of rectification, or tikkun, of our nefesh by doing mitzvos, the tikkun of our ruach by developing an affinity for Torah and dedicating time to study it, and the tikkun of our neshama by knowing Torah and thereby clinging to Hashem. We will then achieve our purpose as Jews and deserve every blessing in this parsha.

Three Types of Holy Days

The Shem Mishmuel then explains that we have three kinds of Jewish holidays, each one emphasizing a different dimension: Shabbos, Yom Tov, and Rosh Chodesh. Each one relates to a different level of the Jewish soul. Yom Tov relates to our biological life force, our nefesh. This is divided into three blessings: *bnei, chayei, and mezonei*. On Pesach, we eat a lot of mitzva food: Korban Pesach, matza, and maror. Pesach relates to food, *mezonei*.

On Shavuot, Hashem gave us the Torah, which gives us long life, *chayei*. Our people is timeless. Other nations come and go, but our nation is eternal. We have outlived all of our enemies, including the Romans, Greeks, Persians, and Egyptians. We have outlived the kings and queens of Spain, Germany, England, and Russia, and all the countries that have expelled and persecuted us. All of these nations tried to snuff out the life of Israel. They have disappeared from history, but we live on. Today’s new aspiring Hitlers will also disappear, and we will survive their threats just as we have survived the earlier ones. We live on because we have the Torah, the eternal Book of Life.

Sukkos is the holiday of Jewish children and the family of Israel, *bnei*. We celebrate the holiday of Sukkos with our families in the holy Sukkah, enveloped by the holiness of God’s presence.

Pesach, Shavuot, and Sukkos are the holidays of *bnei*,

chayei, and mezonei, the three physical blessings we all aspire to. These are the three holidays of the nefesh.

Rosh Chodesh, when the moon returns after its disappearance, is according to Chassidus the holiday of Dovid Hamelech. It is the holiday of renewal. King Dovid was the great commander of Shaul's army, but then he was banished, only to return as king of Israel. King Dovid teaches us the lesson of hope, faith, and renewal.

Rosh Chodesh contains within it the powers of survival, tranquility, peace, and renewal. It is the holiday of the ruach. Dovid Hamelech wrote, "*Kavei el Hashem chazak v'ya'ameitz libecha v'kavei el Hashem*. Have hope in God, be strong, and have hope in God" (Tehillim 27:14). Maintain hope when things are good. Be strong and have hope even when things are not good. Keep your faith in God even then. Jewish optimism and faith are the blessing of the ruach. They come from our passion for Torah and from the effort we invest in its study and observance.

Shabbos and the Holy Soul

The holy day of Shabbos is the holiday of the neshama and of Torah. On Shabbos, we read seven aliyos from the Torah, more than any other day. On Yom Kippur we

Eretz Yisrael & Am Yisrael

Mrs. Michal Horowitz

This Shabbos is Shabbos Chazak and with this week's double parshios, Behar-Bechukosai, we once again conclude Sefer Vayikra. In Bechukosai, we read of the terrible klalos (curses) that will befall the nation should it not go in the ways of Hashem. However, in the midst of the listing of the curses, the pasuk tells us:

and I will lay the Land desolate, and your enemies who dwell in her will find desolation (Vayikra 26:32). What does this mean? Rashi explains: *והשמתני אני את הארץ. זו מדה טובה לישראל, שלא ימצאו האויבים נחת רוח בארצם, שתהא שוממה מיושביה* - *and I will lay the Land desolate: this is a good measure (good tidings) for Israel, for the enemies who dwell in their Land (the Land of Israel) will not find contentment or fulfillment in her (when Israel is not in her Land), for she (the Land) will remain desolate of her inhabitants* (Rashi, ibid).

What is Rashi teaching us? And is this another one of the klalos - that our beloved, holy Land will remain desolate throughout the millennia of our exile - or is this a veiled bracha, good tidings and comfort for an exiled

read six, on Yom Tov five, on Rosh Chodesh four, and on weekdays we read only three. We learn and know Torah on Shabbos. It is the day when we feel closest to Hashem. It is mei'ein olam haba; we feel our greatest closeness to God. On Shabbos, His presence is revealed in a unique way, and we can connect to and feel it. What is amazing is that this holiest of days revisits us every week! We get to feel a taste of the closeness to Hashem that we will experience in olam haba, and we experience it through our knowledge of Torah.

Our Prayer for Holiness and Blessings

We read of the blessings of bounty, children, tranquility, closeness to God, and attaining holiness. We all want these blessings. We yearn for them, especially after such a long and difficult exile. But we cannot attain these blessings unless we fulfill the Torah's mandate at the beginning of this parsha.

This is our deepest prayer, that Hashem give us the strength to do what is right and to achieve His blessings. With Hashem's help, we and every Jew in the world will be able to fulfill the verse, to walk in God's mitzvos, to keep them, and to do them.

nation?

In a most moving and beautiful piece, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik zt'l, the Rav, teaches: "The Land of Israel cannot be built by just any people or group. Only the Jewish people possess the capacity to transform it into a settled Land and to make the desolate waste bloom. This divine promise became a miraculous fact in the history of the Land of Israel during various periods. We must not forget, even for a moment, that the Land of Israel drew the nations of the world - Christians and Muslim alike - like a magnet. The medieval Crusades were undertaken for the purpose of conquering the Land of Israel and colonizing it with a Christian population. All of the efforts of the Crusaders were in vain, and they did not take root in the land. Even the Muslims, who were already in the land, did not succeed in colonizing it properly.

"Those who exile the Jewish people and replace them as residents of Eretz Yisrael (E"Y) will reside in a desolate land. They will starve because the Land will not give of itself to them. Our enemies drove our ancestors out of

Jerusalem. They set fire to it and destroyed the BHM”K. But they never colonized or populated it. Mt. Zion was desolate for a very long time, and despite many attempts, not a single nation, not one other people, ever succeeded in establishing a state in E”Y. Many peoples were eager and ready to colonize it. It is a land considered holy by Muslims and Christians. It was occupied by many powers - by Rome, later by Byzantium, by the Muslims, by the Crusaders, and then by the Muslims again. It changed hands so many times, but no one developed E”Y agriculturally, industrially, or scientifically.

“In the 18th and the beginning of the 19th centuries, entire continents and huge stretches of land like Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa were colonized and settled by the British. They took desert country, jungle, and converted it into blossoming gardens. They brought civilization to pagans. Yet the same British could not colonize E”Y. It is a special land, an *eretz chemdah*. With the exception of a small colony here and there, no one was able to colonize it on a grand scale. E”Y remained a desolate land.

“Contrast this to the flourishing of the *yishuv* in E”Y. It is a very young *yishuv*, in existence only since the turn of the 20th century. And yet see what its members have accomplished! Apparently there is a sense of loyalty on the part of the land that she will never betray her people, she will not give herself up to strangers or to conquerors. She will save herself only for the people to whom E”Y belongs” (Chumash Masores Ha’Rav, Vayikra, p.229-231, See also Fate & Destiny, p.37-38).

In his speech delivered to the *yeshiva* on Yom Ha’atzmaut 5760, fifty-two years after the establishment of the State, Rabbi Zalman Baruch Melamed (Rosh *Yeshiva* of Bet El *Yeshiva*) stated: “We have merited what many generations did not merit: we are able to live in E”Y. Moshe and Aharon were not allowed to enter the Land, yet we are here. The great Talmudic Sages of Bavel also did not merit it, nor, in later generations, did the Geonim,

Rishonim, or the Achronim - and yet we have been granted the great privilege of returning to E”Y from where we were exiled two millennia ago. There were some Torah giants who did merit reaching E”Y, but under very difficult conditions. The Ramban ascended to the Land towards the end of his life, but found it desolate. As he wrote, the most sacred parts of the Land were the most wasted; J’lem, home to the Holy Temple, was more desolate than anywhere else in the Holy Land!

“Today, we have the great honor and joy of living here, not under foreign rule, but as a free nation, sovereign in E”Y. How fortunate is the generation that has merited all this! It is true that we have paid a very high price for returning to the sanctity of E”Y, for conquering, liberating and maintaining it. More than 19,000 (this speech was delivered 23 years ago; since then, R”L, this number has tragically risen) soldiers and civilians have lost their lives in military campaigns and terror attacks, and each and every casualty is an entire world ... E”Y was acquired with spilled blood; the land was redeemed and restored to its children, to its true owners, by the self-sacrifice of the soldiers and citizens of Israel ...

“The glowing light of Mashiach will one day rise up to become a great flame, a tremendous light stemming from the light of the Resurrection of the dead, the light of eternity. That is why this day is one of such great joy. It marks 52 years of our independence, twice 26, the numerical value of the ineffable Name of G-d, doubling and multiplying the complete revelation of G-d’s Name in the world” (This is the Day, Me’Avnei HaMakom, Beit El *Yeshiva*, p.160-161).

Let us always remember the promise of Hashem to the Avos, as He declared to Avraham: כִּי אֶת-בְּלִ-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר-אַתָּה עַד-עוֹלָם וְלִדְוָרְךָ, וְלִדְוָרְךָ, וְלִדְוָרְךָ - *For this entire Land that you see, to you and to your seed I will give it, forever* (Bereishis 13:15). “She is a faithful Land; she will save herself for the people to whom She belongs”... May we merit the complete and final redemption and ingathering of the exiles, may it be immediate and in our days.

Close, But Not Too Close

Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

Every Yom Kippur, sometime before the repetition of the *musaf* amidah, paper towels appear around shul. During the *Avodah* poem, people place these flimsy napkins on the ground, a barrier between the floor and

their foreheads. To quote the Arts Scroll *Machzor* for Yom Kippur, “The Torah forbids one to prostrate himself [i.e. with outstretched arms and legs] on a floor of hewn stone. (Leviticus 26:1)” What is this prohibition about?

Idolatry

Rambam wrote that this is prohibited “lest it appear like idol worship, for so they would make decorated stone with sophisticated craft before the statue, and upon it they would bow to the statue.” (Sefer haMitzvot, Lo Taaseh 12) This is consistent with Rambam’s rationale for many prohibitions, such as limitations on haircuts and diet.

Appearance of Idolatry

In a different facet of the idolatry issue, Sefer haChinuch contended that the issue was “lest one appear to bow to the stone itself. Since they prepare and design it, and it is attractive, there is room for suspicion.” (Sefer haChinuch 349) This is not a concern when bowing on other materials; one would only be suspected of worshipping a material with the durability of stone.

Emulating the Beit haMikdash

Rashi offered a third idea, which leads us to a broader theme in Jewish law and thought. Rashi wrote, “The Torah prohibited this outside the Beit haMikdash.” (Commentary to Vayikra 26:1) As Rashi wrote elsewhere, we are not allowed to emulate the service in the Beit haMikdash. Since the floor of the Beit haMikdash is stone, we should not bow low on stone floors in other spaces. (See Rashi to Megillah 22b lo)

Presumably, Rashi was informed by the following Talmudic passage regarding emulating the Beit haMikdash:

One may not make a house in the form of the Sanctuary (*heichal*), a large room in the form of the Entrance Hall (*ulam*), a yard in the form of the Anteroom (*azarah*), a table in the form of the Table, a menorah in the form of the Menorah. (Avodah Zarah 43a)

But this is odd; we have a mitzvah of memorializing the Beit haMikdash! Counting the Omer, as we have done for the past five weeks, is a fulfillment of that imperative! Why does the Torah prohibit bowing on a floor like that of the

Stop Worrying

Rabbi Efram Goldberg

Parshas Behar begins with the mitzva of shemita, which forbids performing agricultural work during the seventh year. For an entire year, all farmers must leave their fields alone, refraining from plowing, planting, and large-scale harvesting.

The Torah anticipates the concern that people will have suspending all farming activity for entire year: וכי תאמרו מה

Beit haMikdash?

Certain relationships are defined by polar mitzvot – one attracts, the other repels. The first affords intimacy while the second prevents an inappropriate sense of ownership and access:

- We have a mitzvah of honouring parents, which includes feeding and clothing them. But we also have a mitzvah of awe, which requires that we never sit in their seat or contradict them.
- We have a mitzvah of remembering Shabbat, which includes creating the day itself with kiddush, fine food, bathing, and nice clothing, all of which can create a sense of ownership. But we also have a mitzvah of guarding Shabbat, restricting ourselves from the creative tasks which identify us as masters all week.
- We have a mitzvah of loving Hashem, but we are also commanded to have a distancing awe of Hashem.

The same may be true for our relationship with the Beit haMikdash. We build the Beit haMikdash ourselves, we support it with our half-shekel donations, and we visit there at least three times each year – but we do not own it. We dare not become too familiar – and one way to avoid that familiarity is to impose a law against reconstructing the Beit haMikdash in our communities.

The concern for over-familiarity is not limited to the Beit haMikdash; the same applies in our shuls. We need a space in which we feel comfortable pouring out our hearts. We need to be there daily, morning and evening. But we also need to feel distant, so that we will be respectful when we approach Hashem. Hence our rules about not using a davening space as a shortcut, about not engaging in idle talk there, and about wearing honoured clothing there.

May we merit to learn the lesson of the stone floor, and avoid becoming too close – even as we enjoy a genuine intimacy with Hashem.

“And if you say: What will we eat during the seventh year, if we will not plant and not gather our grain?!” (25:20).

God responds (25:21) that He will have the land produce extra food during the sixth year, to provide a surplus that will sustain the people: וציייתי את ברכתי לכם בשנה השישית, ועשת את התבואה לשלוש השנים.

Rav Elimelech of Lizhensk, in Noam Elimelech, cites his brother, Rav Zusha of Anipoli, as raising the question of why the Torah presents this promise in the form of a response to the people's question. Why did God not simply assure us that we will be cared for despite not planting during the shemita year? Why is this promise first prefaced with the question that the Torah anticipates people asking – *מה נאכל בשנה בשביעית*?

From the Torah's presentation, Rav Zusha noted, it appears as though this promise is made only in response to the people's question. If the people would not ask this question, then God would not send a special blessing providing extra produce during the sixth year. How is this possible? Why would God grant His special blessing only because the people worriedly ask, *מה נאכל בשנה השביעית*, because the people worriedly ask, *מה נאכל בשנה השביעית*, because the people worriedly ask, *מה נאכל בשנה השביעית*?

Rav Zusha answered that Hashem created the world with “pipelines” through which His blessing descends into the world. Constantly, at all times, He is sending us our sustenance, providing us with what we need. However, Rav Zusha explained, a deficiency in our bitahon, our trust in Hashem, interferes with this system. When we start worrying, when we are afraid that maybe we won't have what we need, it is as though we puncture holes in the pipes that bring us blessing, such that the blessing “leaks”

from the pipes and thus cannot reach us.

When the people ask *מה נאכל בשנה השביעית*, they damage the pipelines, so-to-speak. God, in His infinite mercy, announces, *וְצִוִיתִי אֶת בְּרַכְתִּי לָכֶם* – that He will repair the damage so that His beracha can descend despite our deficient faith. If we hadn't asked this question, if our faith had been firm, and we hadn't entertained any doubts about our financial security during and after shemita, the pipelines would have continued functioning normally, and so there would have been no need for a special beracha. It is only because of our deficient faith, our unnecessary anxiety, that this blessing is necessary.

We have to stop worrying about our parnasa, and about what the future will bring. Of course, we need to be responsible and put in the work, fulfilling our duty of hishtadlus, investing effort and taking the initiative to secure a livelihood. Concomitantly, however, we must place our trust in Hashem, remembering that He is caring for us and providing our needs at all times. We don't ever need to ask *מה נאכל בשנה בשביעית*, worrying about how we will pay our bills. Instead, we should remain confident that Hashem is looking for out for us and ensure that we always have precisely what we are supposed to have.

The Revolutionary Nature of Shemita and Yovel

Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald

In parashat Behar, the first of this week's two parshiot, Behar-Bechukotai, we encounter the remarkable laws of *שְׁמִטָּה*, the Sabbatical year, and *יּוֹבֵל*, the Jubilee celebration.

In Leviticus 25:1-2, the Al-mighty instructs Moses to speak to the people of Israel and to tell them: *כִּי תָבֹאוּ אֶל הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי נֹתֵן לָכֶם, וְשָׁבַתָּהּ הָאָרֶץ שְׁבַת לַהֲשָׁמָה*, *When you come into the land which I give you, then shall the land keep a Sabbath unto the L-rd.*

Just as G-d created the world in six days and rested on the seventh, and just as the Jewish people are instructed to rest on the Sabbath day, so too, must the land of Israel, upon which the Jewish people dwell, rest in its seventh year. This remarkable and revolutionary law of Shemita, called for the cessation of planting in every seventh year of the Sabbatical cycle. Only that which grows wild may be eaten by the farmer. As a result, the concept of ownership of land vanishes during this year. Consequently, at any

time, a needy person may enter a field and remove enough food to feed himself and his family.

Some scholars point to this law as the earliest form of the agricultural process that is today known as “crop rotation.” The land is allowed to rest, its nutrients restored, enabling the land to become more fertile and productive in the future years.

The seventh year was not merely a respite from work, it was, in fact, a national educational exercise that culminated in a massive educational celebration for both men and women, as well as children. According to Maimonides Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Chagigah 3:3, this massive educational assemblage, took place on the first day of the intermediate days of Sukkot, on the year following the Shemita observance. As the Torah in Deuteronomy 31:10-13, commands, the people of Israel would gather together in Jerusalem for what was known as *הַקְהָל*—*Hakhel*. In a most impressive ceremony, the King of Israel (not the

priests or the rabbis!) would take out a Torah scroll and begin to teach the people. Even resident aliens were taught the teachings and duties of the Torah at this Hakhel gathering.

The Hertz Bible commentary cites the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus who notes that most ancient societies kept intellectual knowledge restricted to the elite. Moses and the Jewish people, in effect, revolutionized education by disclosing the great ideas of the Torah to the entire people of Israel, men, women and children, thus exposing the full nation to knowledge. Hertz proudly cites F. Verinder, a non-Jewish English scholar, who expressed his amazement at the Jewish Sabbatical year practice, declaring that it is the equivalent of sending the English worker once every seven years to a year's course at a university to learn science, law, literature, and theology.

Not everyone was so favorably impressed by this practice. The Roman historian Tacitus (55-117 C.E.) ridiculed the observance of the Sabbatical year, attributing it to laziness on the part of the Jewish people. On the other hand, Alexander the Great (356 B.C.E.-323 B.C.E.) and even the Roman Emperor Julius Caesar (100 B.C.E.-44 B.C.E.) relieved the Jews from paying some of their taxes during the seventh year when they did not work their fields.

Just as the land lay fallow every seven years, every fiftieth year, with the arrival of Jubilee—the Yovel, the land returned to its original owners.

Modern scholars speculate about the origin of the word “Yovel,” suggesting that it might have originally meant “ram,” because of the ram’s horn that was sounded ushering in the Jubilee. Others say that it has to do with the root of the Hebrew word for “release.” The Ramban says that the word means “to transport,” because at Yovel everything is returned to its original independence and to its original root, which is, of course, G-d Al-mighty.

In the Yovel year, as in the Shemita, the land again lies fallow. All Hebrew servants receive their liberty, but most importantly, all landed property that had been sold by its original owners during the previous 49 years, reverted back to those owners, allowing families that received those tribal lands when the land was first apportioned during the conquest of Canaan by Joshua, to return to their original patrimony. According to the rabbis, this restoration reflected the powerful message recorded in Psalms 24:1: לַיהוָה הָאָרֶץ וּמְלוֹאָתָהּ, תִּבְלַ וְיִשְׁבֵי בָּהּ, *The earth and its fullness belong to G-d, the world and its inhabitants.*

The Yovel represents one of Judaism’s most revolutionary contributions to humanity. Its implementation and practice meant that no person was destined to be poor forever. If a person’s fate had taken a turn for the worse, and due to business and agricultural reversals had to sell his real estate, there was always the hope and anticipation that, come Yovel, the land would be restored to the original owner. Furthermore, the descendants of the person who had become poor, now enjoyed the same advantages along with all the other land owners, receiving a new start with the return of their ancestral family estate.

So highly regarded was the practice of Yovel by Henry George, the great American social reformer, 1839-1897, that he acknowledged his indebtedness to the laws of the Jubilee as one of the sources for his lifelong passion to eliminate inequities in his contemporary economic system. Writes George,

It is not the protection of property, but the protection of humanity, that is the aim of the Mosaic code. Its Sabbath day and Sabbath year secure even the lowliest, rest and leisure. With a blast of the Jubilee trumpets, the slave goes free, and the redivision of the land secures again to the poorest his fair share in the bounty of the common Creator.

Once again, we see how the Torah is truly “light years” ahead of its time. Judaism’s understanding and deep appreciation of the need for universal education, the necessity to set aside sacred time for family and for study, and the farsighted vision of a system that allowed for a more equitable distribution of wealth among all the inhabitants of the lands, is nothing short of revolutionary!