

You are not worthless (*Bechukotai*)

Towards the end of *Parshat Bechukotai*, after the long list of chilling curses which we are told will be meted out to *Bnei Yisrael* if they disobey God's commands, God then instructs Moshe to, 'speak to *Bnei Yisrael* and say, "When a person makes a spoken vow to the Lord to give the equivalent of the value of a person..." (Vayikra 27:2).

As there is no obvious association between the curses that are listed in the *parsha* and these *Arachin* laws (i.e. the laws relating to making a vow of the value – *Erech* - of a person), Rabbi Yaakov Yitzchak HaLevi Horowitz (1745-1815), otherwise known as the 'Chozeh' of Lublin, asks why these two topics are juxtaposed with one another?

He answers that when a person focuses on the consequences and punishments which they may experience as a result of their failure to live up to what is expected of them, they may doubt themselves, their abilities, their meaning and their worth. In fact, some people may even conclude that they are worthless.

With this in mind, the Chozeh of Lublin explains that the laws of *Arachin* follow the curses which are listed in *Parshat Bechukotai* in order to teach us that even when God is disappointed in us, and even when God threatens to punish us, we are still precious and valuable.

Interestingly, the biblical book with one of the highest number of citations of words containing the root *Erech* (value) is *Sefer Iyov*, the Book of Job (see 6:4, 13:18, 23:4, 28:13, 28:17, 28:19, 32:14, 33:5, 36:19, 37:19, 41:4). The question is: why is this the case?

I believe that the answer to this question is the same as that offered by the Chozeh of Lublin – namely that when we experience struggle, anguish and loss, this can lead us to doubt our meaning, our purpose, and our worth.

Accordingly, in those moments of doubt, and amidst those confusing feelings which can lead a person to feel purposeless and worthless, the repeated reference to the concept of value and worth serves to remind us that we are precious, that life is valuable, and that there is more to us than what happens to us. As Viktor Frankl writes in his *Man's Search for Meaning*, while 'despair is suffering without meaning', 'if we can find something to live for - if we can find some meaning to put at the center of our lives - even the worst kind of suffering becomes bearable.'

And it is this idea which is captured in the concept of *Arachin* found at the end of *Parshat Bechukotai*, and in the word *Erech* which is repeatedly found throughout *Sefer Iyov*.

Shabbat Shalom!