

OHR NET

SHABBAT PARSHAT BECHUKOTAI · 19 IYAR 5768 · MAY 24, 2008 · VOL. 15 NO. 33

PARSHA INSIGHTS

DAY OF THE LAND

"I will make the Land desolate and your foes who dwell upon it will be desolate... Then will the Land be appeased for its Sabbaticals during all the years of desolation, while you are in the land of your foes; then the Land will rest and it will appease for its Sabbaticals..." (26:32/35)

This year is a Shmitta (Sabbatical) year. Just as the People of Israel have their Shabbat, the Land of Israel has its Shabbat

When the Jewish People failed to keep the Land of Israel's years of rest they were sent into exile. If they did not let the Land rest during their presence, it rested during their absence. Seventy violated Sabbatical years before and during the period of the First Beit Hamikdash resulted in a Babylonian exile of seventy years.

Before the Roman exile, Josephus Flavius testified to the abundance of Eretz Yisrael: "...for it is an extremely fertile land, a land of pastures and many varieties of trees... The entire land is planted by her inhabitants and not one stretch of earth is left uncared for. Because the land is blessed with such goodness, the cities of the Galil and numerous villages are densely populated. Even the smallest of villages boasts of at least 15,000 inhabitants."

In 1260, the Ramban (Nachmanides), writing to his son from Eretz Yisrael, gave a very different picture: "What shall I tell you concerning the condition of the Land... She is greatly forsaken and her desolation is great... That which is of greater holiness is more desolate than that which is of lesser holiness. Yerushalyim is most desolate and destroyed."

Six centuries later, in 1867, Mark Twain found the Land in a similar condition: "A desolate land whose soil, though more than sufficiently rich, produces only thorn bush and thistle — a silent mourning expanse. There exists here a state of neglect that even the imagination is incapable of granting it the possibility of beauty, of life and productivity. We arrived in peace to Mount Tabor... we did not see a soul during the entire journey... everywhere we went there was no tree of shrub." "The Land of Israel dwells in sackcloth and ashes. The spell of a curse hovers over her, which has blighted her fields and imprisoned the might of her power with shackles." "The Land of Israel is a wasteland... The Land of Israel is no longer to be considered part of the actual world..."

Compare this quasi-post-nuclear scene with the Torah's dire warning:

"...and the foreigner who will come from a distant land — when they will see the plagues of the Land and the illnesses with which G-d has inflicted it; sulfur and salt, a conflagration of the entire Land, it cannot be sown and it cannot sprout, and no grass shall rise up on it... And all the nations will say 'For what reason did G-d do so to this Land?' (Devarim 29:21)

For centuries, the Christian church tried to make mileage out of the above verse, claiming that the desolation of the Land of Israel was proof that G-d had rejected the Jewish People. However, the Ramban points out that the desolation of the Land of Israel is really a blessing in disguise. In this week's Torah portion it states, "I will make the Land desolate and your foes who dwell upon it will be desolate..." During all our exiles, our Land will not accept our enemies. It will refuse to be fertile so that no other nation may settle in the Land. An army may conquer territory, but to establish a permanent settlement requires the cooperation of the Land.

The Maharsha writes, "As long as Yisrael does not dwell on its Land, the Land does not give her fruits as she is accustomed. When she will begin to flower again, however, and give of her fruits, this is a clear sign that the end — the time of the Redemption — is approaching when all of Yisrael will return to its Land."

Eretz Yisrael is like a faithful wife who is told that her husband languishes in a foreign jail from which he will never return. Nevertheless, she waits for him, accepting no suitor in his place, convinced that one day, he will return.

- Sources: Talmud Shabbat 33a, Josephus Flavius - 'The Jewish Wars'; Ramban, 'Letter to his Son' 1260; Mark Twain 'The Innocents Abroad or the New Pilgrim's Progress' 1867

PARSHA OVERVIEW

The Torah promises prosperity for the Jewish People if they follow G-d's commandments. However, if they fail to live up to the responsibility of being the Chosen People, then chilling punishments will result. The Torah details the harsh historical process that will fall upon them when Divine protection is removed. These punishments, whose purpose is to

bring the Jewish People to repent, will be in seven stages, each more severe than the last. *Sefer Vayikra*, the Book of Leviticus, concludes with a detailed description of *Erachin* – the process by which someone can make a vow to give to the *Beit Hamikdash* the equivalent monetary value of a person, an animal, or property.

ISRAEL Forever

THE CHOICE IS OURS

The *Tochacha*, which is the dominant theme of this week's Torah portion, is a chilling warning to Jews in every generation of what they are likely to suffer from if they fail to study the Torah and observe its *mitzvot*.

Jews have, however, proven to be a stubborn, stiff-necked people who blindly choose to interpret their historic suffering as nothing more than a manifestation of anti-Semitism rather than Heavenly retribution.

When we look with sadness upon the suffering of the Jews throughout the world today, especially in the historic homeland of our people, we must take the warning of the *Tochacha* to heart and resolve to become more attached to our Torah tradition. Only then will we be certain of gaining the rewards listed in this Torah portion before the awesome *Tochacha* — material prosperity and dwelling in security in Israel forever.

LOVE OF THE LAND - THE PLACES

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael

EIN ZEITIM – TOMB OF RABBI KRUSPEDAI

Although we find no trace of his name in the Talmud, Rabbi Kruspedai is frequently mentioned in the Zohar.

Located about two miles from Zefat the grave of this Sage served as a prayer site for the Jews of Zefat who fled from Arab riots in the 1830s. "There we sat and also wept," wrote a wit-



ness from that period in a reference to the Psalmist's words about the Babylonian exile. "We prayed to G-d to save us in the merit of the *tzad-dikim*."

Today, as well, Jews who visit Zefat to pray at the holy tombs include in their excursion a stop at the tomb of Rabbi Kurspedai in Ein Zeitim.

לע"נ

מרת ביילא בת ר' דוד ע"ה
ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

OHRNET magazine is published by OHR SOMAYACH Tanenbaum College

POB 18103, Jerusalem 91180, Israel • Tel: +972-2-581-0315 • Email: info@ohr.edu • www.ohr.edu

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PARSHA Q&A ?

1. To what do the words “*bechukosai telechu*” (walk in My statutes) refer?
2. When is rain “in its season?”
3. What is the blessing of “*v’achaltem lachmechem l’sova*” (and you shall eat your bread to satisfaction)?
4. What is meant by the verse “and a sword will not pass through your land?”
5. Mathematically, if five Jewish soldiers can defeat 100 enemy soldiers, how many enemy soldiers should 100 Jewish soldiers be able to defeat?
6. How much is ‘*revava*’?
7. Which “progression” of seven transgressions are taught in Chapter 26, and why in that particular order?
8. What is one benefit which the Jewish People derive from the Land of Israel’s state of ruin?
9. What was the duration of the Babylonian exile and why that particular number?
10. How many years did the Jewish People sin in Israel up till the time the northern tribes were exiled?
11. In verse 26:42, the name Yaakov is written with an extra “*vav*”. From whom did Yaakov receive this extra letter and why?
12. What positive element is implied by the words “and I will bring them into the land of their enemies?”
13. In verse 26:42, why is the word “remember” not used in connection with the name of Yitzchak?
14. Why does the Torah say in 26:46 “*Toros*” (plural) and not “*Torah*” (singular)?
15. What happens when a poor person dedicates the value of a man to the *Beit Hamikdash* and doesn’t have sufficient funds to fulfill his vow?
16. If a person says “The leg of this animal shall be an *olah* offering”, the animal is sold and sacrificed as an *olah* offering. What is the status of the money received for the animal?
17. If a person dedicates his ancestral field to the *Beit Hamikdash* and fails to redeem it before *Yovel* what happens to the field?
18. Where must “*Ma’aser Sheini*” be eaten?
19. When a person redeems “*Ma’aser Sheini*” what happens to the food? What happens to the redemption money?
20. How does a person tithe his animals?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week’s Questions!

All references are to the verses and Rashi’s commentary unless otherwise stated.

1. 26:3 - Laboring in Torah learning.
2. 26:4 - At times when people are not outside (e.g., Shabbos nights).
3. 26:5 - You will only require a little bread to be completely satisfied.
4. 26:6 - No foreign army will travel through your land on their way to a different country.
5. 26:8 - Two Thousand.
6. 26:8 - Ten Thousand.
7. 26:14,15 - Not studying Torah, not observing *mitzvot*, rejecting those who observe *mitzvot*, hating Sages, preventing others from observing *mitzvot*, denying that G-d gave the *mitzvos*, denying the existence of G-d. They are listed in this order because each transgression leads to the next.
8. 26:32 - No enemy nation will be able to settle in the Land of Israel.
9. 26:35 - 70 years. Because the Jewish People violated 70 *Shemita* and *Yovel* years.
10. 26:35 - 390 years.
11. 26:42 - In five places in the Torah Yaakov’s name is written with an extra “*vav*” and in five places the name Eliyahu is missing a “*vav*.” Yaakov took these vavs as a pledge that Eliyahu will one day come and announce the redemption of Yaakov’s children.
12. 26:41 - G-d Himself, so to speak, will bring them into their enemies’ land. This means that even when the Jews are in exile, G-d will supply them with leaders who inspire them to keep the Torah. This guards the Jews from assimilating into the host culture.
13. 26:42 - Because the image of Yitzchak’s ashes (who was prepared to be brought as an offering) upon the altar is always before G-d.
14. 26:46 - To teach that both the Written Torah and the Oral Torah were given to Moshe on *Har Sinai*.
15. 27:8 - The person whose value was donated goes before the *kohen*, who sets the obligation according to the poor person’s ability to pay.
16. 27:9 - The money is ‘*chullin*,’ meaning it does not have ‘holy’ status, except for the value of the animal’s leg which does have ‘holy’ status.
17. 27:16 - It becomes the property of the *kohanim* who are on rotation at the beginning of *Yovel*.
18. 27:30 - In Jerusalem.
19. 27:31 - The food becomes permissible to him outside of Jerusalem. The redemption money must be brought to Jerusalem and used to purchase food to be eaten there.
20. 27:32 - He passes them through a door individually and every tenth animal he marks with a rod smeared with red dye.

- The warning given by a man to his wife whom he suspects of unfaithfulness
- The connection between *Mesechta Sotah* and *Mesechta Nazir* preceding it
- Marriages made in Heaven
- When the testimony of a single witness regarding the suspected wife is sufficient
- The debate over three Torah directives as to whether they are obligatory or optional
- The impact of sin on life in this world and the next
- The length of time the suspected wife must spend isolated with her paramour for her to be considered a *sotah*
- The importance of washing and drying hands before eating
- The danger of pride and praise of humility
- When a *sotah* is not tested with the bitter water
- When the bitter water has no effect on the *sotah* or a delayed one
- Who escorts the *sotah* to the *Beit Hamikdash* for the test of the bitter water
- The efforts of the High Court in Yerushalayim to persuade the *sotah* to confess her sin
- The historical confessions of Reuven and Yehuda
- The place and the process of the *sotah's* test
- Avoiding doing *mitzvot* in bunches
- The shaming of the *sotah*
- Measure for measure in Heavenly punishments

THE TARYAG TRADITION

The tradition that there are *taryag* (the acronym of the Hebrew letters whose numerical equivalent is 613) *mitzvot* seems to run into a problem in our *gemara*. In regard to three different Torah directives there is a difference of opinion between Rabbi Yishmael and Rabbi Akiva as to whether they are obligatory or optional. Tosefot raises the problem as to how either of these Sages will deal with the statement made by Rabbi Simlai (*Mesechta Maccot* 23b) that 613 *mitzvot* were commanded to Moshe at Sinai. Will the Sage who holds that these three directives are only optional hold that there are three less than the above-mentioned number or will the other Sage who holds that they are obligatory hold that there are three more than that number?

This problem is also dealt with by Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman (RAMbaN) in his commentary on the Sefer Hamitzvot of Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon (RaMbaM). Although he cites a *midrash* which indicates that the number cited by Rabbi Simlai may be a matter of dispute, his conclusion is that the *taryag* tradition must be valid because it is cited so frequently in the Talmud.

The resolution of the problem which both Tosefot and Ramban offer is that the Sage who holds the three mentioned in our *gemara* are optional was aware that there are three others which are also of Torah origin, while the Sage who holds that they are obligatory was aware that three others which his colleague deems to be of Torah origin are really only rabbinical legislation.

• *Sotah* 3a

What the SAGES Say

“One does not commit a sin unless a spirit of irrationality overcomes him.”

• Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish - *Sotah* 3a

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MITZVA INTENTION

From: Gary in Atlanta

Dear Rabbi,

Does a person have to be concentrating and focusing on a mitzvah all the time he's involved in it. I would imagine that's the case, but I personally find it hard to keep my mind focused for a long time. Do I fulfill the mitzvah if I don't have full intention?

Dear Gary,

There is a lengthy discussion in the sources as to whether *mitzvot* need intention – “*kavanah*” – or not.

The halachic conclusion appears to be that *mitzvot* do need intention to fulfill one's obligation (Orach Chaim 60). This means that one is required before fulfilling a mitzvah to clear his mind and focus on the idea that he is about to fulfill a mitzvah according to G-d's will. If he doesn't have at least this basic *kavanah*, he does not fulfill the mitzvah.

Ideally, this intention should be maintained throughout the duration of the mitzvah whether the mitzvah is short like a blessing, or long like learning Torah. And of course, the more depth of contemplation and fervor of intention a person maintains throughout, the better. This would range from keeping in mind the simple meaning and purpose of the mitzvah to the deepest intentions of the Kabala. However, the halacha only requires that a person have the initial, basic *kavanah* to fulfill the mitzvah.

That being said, there are three exceptions that are quite commonly practiced and therefore worth mentioning: *tzitzit*, *tefillin* and *succah*. For these three *mitzvot* the halacha states that in addition to the basic *kavanah* of ful-

filling a mitzvah, one must also have *kavanah* for the reason/meaning of the mitzvah. The question is, what is the basis for these three exceptions?

The commentator referred to as the “Bach” (Bayit Chadash, O. C. 8) explains that only these three are mentioned in the Torah followed by the Hebrew word “*l'ma'an*” — meaning ‘because’ or ‘in order that’ — introducing the reason for the mitzvah. *Tzitzit* — in order that you shall recall my *mitzvot* and do them (Num. 15:40); *Tefillin* — in order that the Torah shall be in your mouths (Ex. 13:9); *Succah* — in order that you recall the redemption from Egypt when G-d caused you to dwell in clouds of glory (Lev. 23:43). Accordingly, when the Torah explicitly indicates the purpose of the mitzvah, one must have intention not only for the act of the mitzvah but for its reason as well.

Nevertheless, it is important to stress that unlike the basic *kavanah* needed for all *mitzvot* to do the mitzvah, the additional *kavanah* required for the meaning of these three *mitzvot* is only “*l'ctechila*” — the ideal — but lacking this extra *kavanah* does not preclude its fulfillment. Also, even regarding the basic *kavanah*, while integral to fulfilling the mitzvah, if one's actions indicate intention to do a mitzvah, even if he doesn't have this in mind explicitly, he still fulfills his obligation. So for example, the mere act of giving charity to the poor or eating matza on Passover reveals that it is the person's inner intention to fulfill a mitzvah even if he doesn't contemplate on the *kavanah* at the time he does it (M. Br. 60).

So Gary, you need to have in mind at least the idea that you are doing a mitzvah as you begin it, or at least be in a context where that *kavanah* is self-evident. But as mentioned, the more *kavanah*, the deeper your thoughts and the more fervent your feelings, the better.

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PARKING AND THE GOLDEN RULE

Question: One of the greatest challenges I find as a driver is finding a parking space in a crowded area. It sometimes forces me to park in a spot that will make it very difficult for the fellow whose car is parked behind me to get out if he comes to do so before I get back. Since I don't expect to be long I am tempted to block the other fellow on the gamble that I will be gone before he returns. What is the right thing to do?

Answer: In all such matters you must act according to the "golden rule" of the Sage Hillel — "Don't do to others what is hateful to you." Just consider how you would

feel if you came back to your car only to find yourself blocked by a driver who gambled that he would get back before you!

Thinking about the other guy is certainly not limited to parking. When you are in a hurry to get someplace and you cut off the car ahead of you in order to make that important turn, first reflect on how you would feel if someone did that to you.

Hillel's golden rule, which spells out the practical application of "Love the other as yourself" should guide you in every aspect of your life.

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY _____

WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

"What are you doing?" asked Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik of his visitor. The great Torah Sage who served as rav of Brisk was visiting the city of Minsk and a former student of his had come to meet him.

"I opened a shop," replied the student, "and am doing very well."

After a little while the rav repeated his question and received the same reply. When this happened a third

time it seemed obvious to the student that he had not been understood.

"I fully understood you," the rav assured him, "but you did not understand me. Everything is determined by Heaven, say our Sages, except for the fear of Heaven. Your success in business is not your doing but that of G-d. But what you are doing in the area of serving G-d is what I have yet to hear from you."

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