

SHABBAT PARSHAT BECHUKOTAI · 20 IYAR 5776 - MAY 28, 2016 · VOL. 23 NO. 34

EDITOR'S NOTE: THIS WEEK BECHUKOTAI IS READ IN ISRAEL AND BEHAR IS READ OUTSIDE OF ISRAEL

PARSHA INSIGHTS

JOE'S HOROSCOPE

"If you will follow My decrees..." (26:3)

oe Cohen is forty-two and a half years old. Joe is an extravagantly generous person. He makes the mitzvah of charity his special province. He neither neglects nor rejects any worthy cause. His house and his heart are open to all.

If you were a stargazer and could look into Joe's horoscope you would see that Joe was not destined for a long life. Joe's "mazal" is anything but "tov". In his mazal, in his horoscope, it says that Joe will die at the age of 43 from a heart attack. However, seeing as our own individual horoscopes are not published in the papers, neither Joe nor anyone else has any idea about Joe's imminent demise. Joe's forty-third birthday passes with the usual birthday gifts, meaning large anonymous financial gifts that Joe gives to charity. Joe's 44th birthday passes in much the same way. So does his 45th, his 46th and his 47th. In fact, not until his 90th birthday does Joe take his leave of this earthly stage, and is brought to the World of Truth.

Simon Shmuzer loves to talk. Unfortunately the vast majority of what emanates from Simon's mouth is putting down other people behind their backs. Simon has developed subtle, and not-so-subtle, character assassination into a fine art. A look at Simon's celestial horoscope would show that Simon is supposed to live to the ripe old age of 89. However, when he turns 47, suddenly Simon develops a malignant disease of the larynx and passes away quite suddenly.

What happened to Joe's and Simon's horoscopes? Should they look for new astrologers?

At the beginning of this weeks Torah portion the Torah gives a detailed picture of the bounty that awaits us if we keep the Torah: "rains in their time; the Land will give its produce the tree its fruit; You will lie down and none with

frighten you; I will cause wild beasts to leave the Land, and a sword will not cross your Land; You will eat very old grain (which will remain fresh and improve with age) so that you will have to move it to make way for the new harvest...."

If you look at all these promises, they all refer to *this* world. There is not one mention about the reward that we will get for keeping the Torah when we get to the World of Truth.

Why not?

The Torah doesn't deal with the rewards and punishments of the Next World because it's obvious that the proper place to receive the reward for our performance of spiritual tasks is in a world of spirituality. The next world is a totally spiritual world designed and constructed with the sole purpose of rewarding or punishing us. The Torah doesn't need to stress the fact that we are recompensed there. Where else would we expect to receive the results of our spiritual actions if not in a world of spirituality?

The surprise is that we are rewarded and punished for spiritual things here in this physical world too. Now that's something we would never have known had the Torah not told us.

However, we don't see that we are rewarded and punished here in this world for our actions. It all looks perfectly natural. It all looks like the "way of the world".

No one saw anything miraculous about Simon's demise, or Joe's longevity. After all, many people die young and more when they are old. And yet both Joe and Simon experienced miracles. We would never know about those miracles had the Torah not spelled them out in this week Torah portion.

• Source: Ramban's Commentary on the Chumash

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ADVICE FOR LIFE

Based on the Talmudic Sages found in the seven pages of the Talmud studied each week in the Daf Yomi cycle

KIDDUSHIN 78 - 82

"Be careful with the honor of Rabbi Meir and his Torah... Be careful with the honor of Rabbi Akiva and his Torah."

These words from Above were quoted by the Satan (yetzer hara, i.e. the human inclination to sin — Rashi) when he ceased attempts to seduce these two great Torah scholars to sin. G-d had initially sent the Satan to test them (and teach them — see the context of these cases in the gemara), and they would see whether they could or could not withstand the temptation to sin which the Satan posed before them. When it appeared that they were faltering, G-d recalled the Satan, with a declaration that he should not tamper with the honor of these great Sages.

The Maharsha asks a question on this gemara. Why was their "greatness" a reason to leave them alone instead of testing them? Our Sages teach in masechta Succah that "whoever is greater than another has a greater yetzer hara than him." Accordingly, it would have been a true test of these great Sages if the Satan would have continued with his mission. Why did he cease before the Sages had a chance to sin, based on the Heavenly announcement declaring their greatness? Shouldn't their greatness be all the more reason to continue the test and possibly succeed in tripping them up, G-d forbid?

The Maharsha answers that the Satan ceased trying to entice them to sin because he understood that his mission was doomed to failure on account of the extraordinary Torah greatness of these Sages. We are taught in *masechta* Sotah (21a) that the Torah has the power to "protect and to save" — i.e., to protect from suffering and to save from sin (Rashi).

I once heard another answer from a great Rabbi in Jerusalem, that the Satan was in fact recalled, not because he was doomed to fail, but rather because he might have possibly succeeded in being a "stumbling block", the result being a disgraceful dishonor of the Sages and their Torah. The Rambam in his introduction to Pirkei Avot called "Shemona Perakim" writes that there is a caveat to the rule in Tractate Succah that "whoever is greater than another has a greater yetzer hara than him." This rule, states the Rambam, is not always true. It applies only to transgressions which are "statutes", which do not have any apparent logical reason for being forbidden. For example, the laws of kashrut and shatnez. In such a case a person who is greater in Torah will have a greater desire to transgress and needs to have extra diligence to overcome his yetzer hara. However, in transgressions which have clear and logical moral reasons — "mishpatim" — such as murder and theft, a greater Torah scholar will certainly not have a greater yetzer hara to transgress! The specific type of temptation to transgress that was put before Rabbi Meir and Rabbi Akiva is of this latter type. The Satan was therefore called off in midstream (literally, in the case of Rabbi Meir), due to the importance of preserving the honor of the Torah of these two great Torah giants.

• Kiddushin 81a

"The best of doctors are (headed) for gehinom (i.e., deserving of severe punishment in the Afterlife)."

This teaching in our *mishna* is one that is oft-quoted, especially when a person feels that his doctor is being unfair in some manner (e.g., not giving antibiotics upon request, not writing an opiate prescription for "chronic pain", or for overcharging), and is the subject of much discussion by our classical Torah commentaries.

One explanation is that a "talented" doctor is often not humble and does not fear G-d, since he knows how to heal himself if needed, and knows what food is healthy to feed himself in order to prevent disease. As a result of this excessive "pride" and lack of fearing G-d he is liable to negligently treat his patients, resulting in their death. In addition he is likely to refrain from accepting impoverished people who require medical attention. (Rashi)

Another commentary states that a doctor who is (or thinks he is) a great expert in the art of healing will not bother to seek a "second opinion" even when he has a doubt regarding his diagnosis or the treatment necessary, and in this way may put the trusting patient's life in danger. Likewise, he will brazenly rely on his own knowledge and "genius" and not properly research the medical literature in order to remain up-to-date and aware of the best medical care that he should be able to provide. (Tiferet Yisrael, who also relates a fascinating story with an amazing "twist" on this topic)

• Kiddushin 82a

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PARSHA Q&A?

- I. 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. Shabbat 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.



BY RABBI PINCHAS KASNETT

Bechukotai

The Curses: Coincidence vs. Divine Providence

f you consider My decrees loathsome, and if your being rejects My ordinances... I will assign upon you... swelling lesions, and burning fever...." (Leviticus 26:14-15)

"If despite this you do not heed Me, then I shall punish you further... your Land will not give its produce, and the tree of the Land will not give its fruit." (Leviticus 26:18-20)

"If you behave casually (attributing your punishments to coincidence and happenstance) with Me and refuse to heed Me, then I shall lay a further blow upon you, seven ways, like your sins. I will incite the wildlife of the field against you...." (Leviticus 26:21-22)

"If despite these you will not be chastised toward Me, and you behave casually with Me, then I too will behave toward you with casualness; and I will strike you, even I, seven ways for your sins... then I will send a pestilence among you...." (Leviticus 26:23-25)

"If despite this you will not heed Me, and you behave toward Me with casualness, I will behave toward you with a fury of casualness; I will chastise you, even I, seven ways for your sins...." (Leviticus 26:27-28)

G-d is telling the people that if they relate their punishments to coincidence and unavoidable happenstance He will multiply those punishments enormously. (The phrase "seven ways like your sins" is not to be taken literally. It means that the increase in punishment will be commensurate with the sins of the people.) This is what the Philistines had said when they refused to accept that it was the Hand of G-d that brought the punishments upon them: "We will know that His Hand does not afflict us, but it was all by chance that this befell us." (Samuel I 6:9)

The incitement of wildlife against the people, although it can be understood literally, more likely refers to Nebuchadnetzer, who is referred to as a lion: "Therefore the lion of the forest struck them" (Jeremiah 5:6). The prediction here is that G-d will send Nebuchadnetzer and his army to attack the people and reduce their number. The people will forsake G-d who had caused them to multiply. G-d in turn will send the enemy to reduce their numbers.

The next verse, "If despite these you will not be chastised toward Me", is a reference to the three already-mentioned punishments: sickness, famine and warfare. These should have been sufficient to convince the people that the punishments were the result of Divine Providence, not coincidence and chance. However, if they continue to do so, G-d answers that He too will behave toward them with coincidence. This is actually two punishments in one. Firstly, He will abandon them to chance and coincidence. Instead of protecting and shielding them against all evil through His special Divine Providence, He will leave them unprotected against the vicissitudes of nature and the surrounding enemies. Secondly, besides leaving them unprotected against all the evils that will naturally befall them, He will intentionally

bring upon them additional evils as a result of His own Divine Providence. This is what is meant by the phrase, "...and I will strike you, even I". The result will be a multiplicity of punishments; again entirely commensurate with their evil behavior.

The warning in verse 27 differs slightly from the previous verse. Here G-d says, "If despite this you will not heed me", whereas in the previous verse He had said "If despite these you will not be chastised toward Me." G-d is referring to the fact that this latest punishment, pestilence, was very severe, resulting in terrible food shortages. If the people continue to persist in their belief that this was a natural occurrence and not the result of intentional Divine Providence, then G-d will deal with them with a fury of coincidence and chance, as His anger would be aroused by their stubborn refusal to see that their punishments were measure for measure for their transgressions, not the result of coincidence or happenstance. Even Pharaoh, who didn't believe in Divine Providence, said when confronted with the plague of hail, "This time I have sinned, G-d is the Righteous One, and I and my people are the wicked ones." (Exodus 9:27). He eventually does believe in Divine Providence, as he says later on, "Take even your sheep and even your cattle, and go - and bless me as well." (Exodus 12:32)

But G-d is telling the Jewish People that they are a stiff-necked nation, blaming all of their misfortune on coincidence. As a result, G-d tells them once again, "I will chastise you, even I..." Once again He tells them that besides what will befall them by happenstance, they will be subjected to G-d's intentional and specific punishments that go far beyond the natural occurrences that befall the other nations of the world.

This is dramatically illustrated by G-d's telling them that they will end up eating their own children due to the severity of the famine that G-d will bring upon them; the Land will become desolate; they will be scattered among the nations. All of these predictions of course came true with the destructions of the Temples and the scattering of the Jewish People throughout the world, especially after the destruction of the Second Temple.

In summary, Abarbanel is emphasizing that the inability of the nation to correct its ways was due to its inability to recognize the root cause of the problem: The relationship of G-d to His Chosen People is fundamentally different from his relationship to the rest of the nations of the world. Other nations are subject to the forces of nature and history; sometimes they rise, sometimes they fall. The Children of Israel are directly under G-d's Divine Providence. This is the source of their reward and this is the source of their punishment. If they don't recognize this reality they will be subjected to the forces that direct the other nations, and the result is likely to be disastrous. Additionally, G-d will punish them further by turning His Divine Providence against them, causing them harm even in circumstances where the natural order of the world should have protected them, as it would have protected any other nation.

BY RABBI YIRMIYAHU ULLMAN

SERVICE AFTER SIN

From: Jackie

Dear Rabbi,

Like everyone, I mess up sometimes and do things I know I shouldn't be doing. The problem is, rather than doing teshuva and relying on G-d to forgive, an inner voice convinces me that after what I've done it would be a chutzpah to serve G-d, and that rather than getting a reward for trying, out of G-d's anger over what I've done and where I've fallen to I'll actually be punished for "serving" Him in such an impure state. I know I need to stop falling, but until I become a tzaddik, how can I keep getting up again?

Dear Jackie,

I admire your honesty and courage to admit what you've done, to evaluate where you are and to be troubled about what to do about it.

I'm sure G-d feels the same way.

The verse says, "A *tzaddik* falls seven times and gets up" (Prov. 24:16). This shows us that what makes the *tzaddik* different is not that he doesn't fall, because he does, and many times. Rather, it's that no matter how many times and in how many ways he falls, he always gets up.

Of course, the inner voice you describe is the evil inclination, which, after causing a person to fall, then tries its hardest to keep the person down. This voice takes many different forms and presents many different convincing arguments to sever a person from G-d. The ways of the *tzaddik* to regain balance are thus also many, as in the verse, "With subterfuge shall you wage war" (lbid 24:6), which the commentaries identify as the war against the evil inclination.

It is beyond our scope to outline all of the various tactics

one may use to dodge and defy this enemy within and without. But based on the specific persuasion you describe, I'll present one approach which should help you break the strangle-hold and empower you to serve G-d despite the inclination's very strong argument to the contrary.

Pirkei Avot (1:3) states: "Be as a servant who serves his master without condition to receive reward". This means we should serve G-d without anticipating reward, even though we know we'll get it. Another version of this teaching states that the servant should serve his master "on condition that he receives no reward". This describes an even higher level of service where we desire no reward for serving, other than the privilege to serve — and any other reward would detract from the purity of that service.

A person who has fallen, and whose evil inner voice insidiously dissuades him from getting up with the claim that he'll actually be punished for attempting to serve G-d in such an impure state, actually has an opportunity to perform an even higher and "purer" form of service than described above. Because now, not only is he serving without an eye to reward, and not only on condition that he receive no reward, he's actually serving despite the anticipation of punishment.

This then should be the answer to such a claim of the evil inclination: If serving G-d in this state will bring punishment, I am willing to suffer to serve Him, which makes my service all the more pure. And what's more, if I'm to suffer for transgressing, what better form of atonement is there than being punished on account of serving Him!

To such a claim, the evil inclination can have no reply. And once one returns to G-d with such self-sacrificing love and commitment, he can certainly rely on a merciful reward, whatever it may be.

PARSHA OVERVIEW _

he 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.

PRAYING PROPERLY

he proper way to approach G-d in prayer is with gentle words of supplication, like one who is in need. One should never make it seem as though his prayers are a burden and he just wants to be finished with them.

According to some *poskim*, if one did not pray in the above manner, he has not fulfilled his obligation and must pray again (Bach, Eliya Rabbah). However, since there is a *machloket* (difference of opinion) on this point, one should try to do his best, but in the event that he does not pray in the aforementioned manner he should not pray again, out of concern that the second prayer may constitute blessings in vein. (Pri Megadim)

One should contemplate on the idea that only G-d can answer one's prayers. No creation, not an angel or any of the Heavenly hosts has the power to grant a request if G-d does not will it to be. (Mishneh Berurah)

The students of the Arizal write that when one says the phrase, "ozer dalim — helps the needy" (said just before the Shemoneh Esrei in the morning prayers) he should picture himself as a poor and destitute person. This applies even to someone who is rich, since he may in fact be poor when it comes to *mitzvot* and good deeds, and therefore unworthy to approach G-d with his requests, if not for His mercy. Also,

in the grave, all are considered poor, since one's money can no longer help. (Kaf HaChaim 16:18)

One should never feel that his prayers should be answered just because they were said with proper intention. In fact, this type of attitude can actually make things worse for the worshiper, causing his sins to be recalled. The rationale for this is as follows: by feeling that one deserves to receive his request, he causes his records to be analyzed in Heaven to see if he is worthy. Once "the books have been opened" on one's past deeds, and they are being reviewed, a negative judgment can be rendered, taking into account one's past sins.

The correct attitude is to rely totally on G-d's kindness, saying in one's heart, "How is it possible for someone as insignificant as me to approach G-d with my requests? He is the King of kings Who rules above all! It is only because of His abundant kindness, which He extends to all of His creations.

The Maharal writes that one shouldn't ask G-d to grant him things only for physical pleasure; instead he should ask G-d to grant him things so he can serve Him better. (Kaf Hachaim)

• Source: Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 98:3,5)

LOVE OF THE LAND

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

THE SOURCE OF THE GIANT STONES

f you have gazed with wonder at those massive stones that form the Western Wall and wondered where they came from, you are not alone in your curiosi-

For years archeologists have assumed that the giant limestones used by King Herod for the reconstruction of the Second Beit Hamikdash and the Western Wall

came from a quarry located in the Old City of Jerusalem. It is now believed that they came from an ancient quarry four kilometers northwest of the Old City, in the city's Ramat Shlomo neighborhood. It was discovered during a "salvage excavation" conducted by the Israel Antiquities Authority in conjunction with municipal plans to build an elementary school in the area.

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RABBI MIKE MOSKOWITZ

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Alumnus of the Ohr Somayach Derech and Beis Hamidrash programs
Graduated Ohr Lagolah in 2002

fter thirteen years without a Rabbi, the Old Broadway Synagogue has finally found an outstanding spiritual leader for their community, Rabbi Mike Moskowitz. He is warm, energetic and as

enthusiastic to be the Rabbi of Old Broadway as the community is enthusiastic to have him. A native of Richmond, Virginia, he returned there after finishing his studies and became the *mashgiach ruchani* (dean of students) at the Yeshiva of Virginia. Later Rabbi Moskowitz created the Torah Learning Center in Richmond, in which he directed a *kollel* for advanced students and established a number of outreach activities including a beginners' minyan.

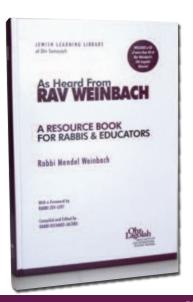
With more Jews moving into

Harlem, and with Columbia University (where Rabbi Moskowitz does his campus outreach work for Ohr Somayach) building their new campus two blocks away, now is the time to make Old Broadway even

more exciting and welcoming for the neighborhood's growing Jewish population. Rabbi & Mrs. Moskowitz employ their energy, vision and learning to make the shul grow, both in people and in Torah.

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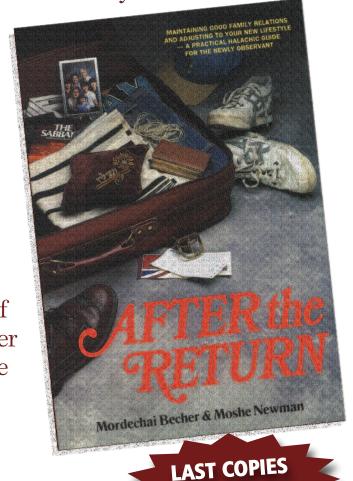
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After the Return

BY RABBI MORDECHAI BECHER AND RABBI MOSHE NEWMAN PUBLISHED BY FELDHEIM PUBLISHERS

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