



**S. FLORIDA ZMANIM**

CANDLE LIGHTING

7:41 PM

S"Z KRIAT SHEMA

9:55 AM

SUNSET

7:59 PM

MOTZEI SHABBAT

8:36 PM

*"Written by a Multifaceted Student Body, Whose Ambition is to Enrich and Enhance Your Study of the Weekly Torah Portion"*

## PARSHAT BECHUKOTAI

פרשת בחקותי

~ י"ז אייר תשע"א ~

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### WE MATTER MORE THAN WE THINK

RABBI NOAH ZISQUIT

I once witnessed a young boy run into the middle of a busy street. His mother ran after him and pulled him back onto the sidewalk. After yelling at her son that he's never to run into the street, she smacked him across his face. It was painful for me to watch her *potch* (hit) her son, and it was probably even more painful for her son, who began to cry soon after. While I doubt that this little boy understood why his loving mother had punished him so severely, I do not think that this little boy was going to run into the street again anytime soon after.

*Parshat Bechukotai* may be one of the most frightening *parshiot* in the Torah. It contains the *Tochacha*, a long list of punishments we will receive if we do not fulfill our obligations as Jews and human beings. The punishments described in the *Tochacha* are so horrifying, that many read the *Tochacha* quickly and in a low voice.

When reading through the *Tochacha*, there are a few things we should keep in mind. Firstly, by becoming aware of the dangers of not behaving properly, we will be more careful to not misbehave in the future. It was for this reason that the Chofetz Chaim was against the practice of reading quickly through the *Tochacha*, but would have preferred that it be recited slowly so that its message could sink in. Furthermore, we must always realize that we can do *tshuva* and fix any wrong we have already committed— we should never despair.

Additionally, we must understand that not only are we punished for what we do wrong, but we are also rewarded for the things we do right. All too often, we tend to focus on the negative side of our behavior, instead of focusing on the good things we do, and the reward we earn for doing them. Before the *parsha* mentions the *Tochacha*, it described the rewards for keeping the Torah and *mitzvot*. The next time we do a *mitzvah* or study Torah, we need to realize that we are receiving reward for every bit of effort and every word learned.

Finally, we must always remember the infinite love and concern that Hashem has for each and every one of us. Hashem notices everything we do in life, and the way we behave is very important to Him. Through our misbehavior, we engage in self destructive behavior, and having our best interest in mind, Hashem may have to punish us.

When we do not heed G-d's many impassioned pleas to treat other human beings and G-d himself with respect, we are like the little boy who runs into the street and gets punished for it. Our "parent," or in this case Hashem, is not exhibiting malice or hatred towards us, but love for the one who matters most. May we heed Hashem's reasoned and reasonable warnings in this week's *parsha* and know no suffering or misfortune.

## SOMETIMES LOVING YOUR NEIGHBOR JUST ISN'T ENOUGH

JOSH FIRESTONE ('13)

In this day and age, people are constantly summarizing and truncating all types of writing. Piles of Jewish literature books are shortened into pamphlets, allowing people to focus on the “exciting parts” and skip what seems to be less thrilling.

But, can we simply “spark-note” our way through Judaism, looking for quick answers and thirty-second tidbits? Didn't the great Hillel once condense the Torah into, “Love your neighbor as yourself;” all while standing on one leg? Although it may seem tempting, to truly be a Torah scholar, you are going to have to put in a serious effort and take the longer path through the “authentic” version.

This week's *parsha* opens with the *pasuk*: "If you follow my laws and are careful to keep my commandments" (26:3), and is then followed by a list of promises for bountiful crops and protection from all dangers. This statement seems to imply that all we need to do to merit the blessings of Hashem is to keep the Torah.

Rashi is troubled by the redundancy in the *pasuk*— of course if we keep the laws of Hashem will we deserve, receive, and enjoy His blessings. Rashi concludes that observing the laws and commandments of our Torah is clearly not enough! The only way to gain the true blessing of Hashem is to be “*ameilim baTorah*,” toiling in the Torah. Living through the Torah requires constant self-improvement— perpetual self-introspection in which we are looking to grow in any and every way possible.

We must always look for ways to bring more Torah into our daily lives. An Olympic runner does not take a break from his practicing on the weekends if he is serious about winning the race. He is persistent, practicing whenever he can, so that he can ultimately achieve his goal. So too, as Jews, we must be proactive with our Torah learning and put in the hard work necessary to produce a positive outcome. Nothing truly meaningful can be accomplished unless we put in the effort required. Go to the original source and learn the actual Torah because “loving your neighbor as yourself” alone is not going to cut it.

## THIS IS YOUR LAND. THIS IS MY LAND.

RASHEL MAIKHOR ('12)

This week, we read the blessings and curses that Hashem promises and threatens to bestow upon the Jews depending on their behavior and observance. Some of the blessings that Hashem guarantees to give them if they heed His commandments and follow in His ways are peace, safety, military success, and abundance.

Unfortunately, ever since its existence, the State of Israel has faced many obstacles. Just during the last couple of months, Israel has faced many difficulties that have not only impacted the country itself, but the entire Jewish nation. With the massacre of the Fogel family, the bombing in Jerusalem, boycotts against Israeli goods, constant rockets being launched, fights over settlements, and the continuous tensions and struggles between Israel and its neighbors, Israel's challenges are truly evident. It is our responsibility as Jews to support Israel, stand by Israel, and do everything we can to advocate on Israel's behalf. We must have *emunah* and listen to the strong message of the *parsha*: we must do our part and obey Hashem's commandments in order for Him to be able to keep our land, and its inhabitants, safe.

We are the chosen nation, the *Am HaNivchar* of Hashem, and it is our duty to be a light unto the other nations. It is critical to prove to Hashem that we are, in fact, an “*am*,” a unified nation, and that our brothers and sisters in Israel do not stand alone. By keeping both sets of commandments, *bein adam lemakom* and *bein adam lechavero*, we will be able to strengthen our relationship with our Creator as well as with one another. Only once we do our part as a nation will Hashem meet us in the middle and fulfill His end of the deal, leading us through the path of redemption, liberation, and ultimate peace.

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We must be proud to be a part of the Jewish nation and continue to follow the Torah in every way. We all have the capability to reach our potential and prove to Hashem and ourselves that we can grow and become better Jews and human beings. May each of our positive actions and prayers continue to help save our nation and country, proving to the spectators and doubters that Hashem will remain by our side for eternity.

## A BIBLICAL BUYER'S MARKET

EVAN DOLGOW ('12)

Only a week after posting a brand new, upscale house in an exclusive development, the real estate agent received two offers for it: one from a very affluent man willing to pay the full listed price and the other from a middle class gentleman hoping for a negotiation on that price.

In an exclusive community, a house on average may sell for seven digits. The question that lingers in our minds is, "who deserves to buy the house?" On one hand, selling the house for the listed price would lead to a higher commission for the realtor, but, on the other hand, the middle class man may have been working day and night in hopes of earning enough money to buy this beautiful house for himself and his family.

In *Parshat Bechukotai*, a similar event occurs. An enigmatic occurrence is presented to us as our forefathers are listed: Yaakov, Yitzchak, and then Avraham. To the trained eye, this line up seems out of place. The forefathers are usually listed in chronological order: Avraham, Yitzchak, and then Yaakov. Why does the Torah present us with this reversed order of the forefathers?

This is because Hashem is deciding whom to accredit the "purchase" of the land. By listing Yaakov first, He shows us that Yaakov, a man whose life is synonymous and replete with hardships, should deserve the credit for the land in return for his burdens.

In the case of the real estate agent, the morally correct decision would be to sell the house to the less wealthy man. He has been doing everything in his effort to provide for his family, while the wealthy man can simply go buy another house of equal or greater value. The rich man is similar to both Avraham and Yitzchak because they did not deserve the gift as much as Yaakov, who is symbolized by the man who struggled to afford the house.

Though this high moral standard is not the norm in the housing market, this week's *parsha* teaches us that hard and laborious work done for the right reasons will ultimately pay off. We must have *emunah* in Hashem that He will judge us righteously and ultimately give the reward to the most deserving and avid candidate.

” מזדור לדור “

**TORAH FROM OUR ALUMNI**

## IT'S NO COINCIDENCE

ALYSSA MUCKLEY ('07)

*Parshiot Behar* and *Bechukotai* (frequently read together in the same week), are both extremely important *parshiot*. In *Behar* the Jewish people are given different laws pertaining to the land of Israel, for instance, *shmittah*. In *Bechukotai* we are given more extreme *Tochacha*, vituperation, on what will befall us should we stray from the path of Torah and *mitzvot*. In reading this *parsha*, particularly the portion pertaining to *Tochacha*, the word "keri," meaning coincidentally, seems to be repeated several times.

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Alyssa Muckley continued

In addition to this word being found no where else in the Torah, usually when a word is repeated, its purpose is to provide a deeper meaning or message into what is being said. In order to derive its purpose, we must first look at the nature of the word "coincidence".

According to the Miriam Webster dictionary, coincidence is defined as: "The occurrence of events that happen at the same time by accident but seem to have some connection." A person who lives his life according assuming that everything is a coincidence is one who does not see the hand of Hashem and most likely would choose not to follow any religion, especially Judaism. Often such a belief might lead an individual to consider his or her life as subjective and arbitrary, without any particular direction or purpose. While it may seem that this concept would not be present amongst observant Jews, one may be surprised to find that coincidence can be a facet of someone's overall beliefs.

Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch points out that the verse says "If you walk with me (Hashem) coincidentally..." meaning, that the person being spoken about in the *Tochacha* views the world as being a product of coincidence. But how can it be that a person follows Hashem at all if he views the world as coincidence without a God that has the ability to intervene? These two statements seem extremely contradictory and oxymoronic.

Rav Hirsch explains that the type of person being referred to here is someone who happens to find himself in a religious framework where he would act as though he is an observant Jew, but not due to his own personal religious convictions. His observance of Torah and *mitzvot* does not stem from his own desire and passion to serve Hashem, but rather from social pressure or societal norms. An individual like this might view Judaism as "coincidentally falling upon him" and as a convenience. It is therefore important to understand that while this person "may walk with Hashem," it is not simply enough to follow the *mitzvot* or rules to be considered a good Jew. One must delve into the *halachot* and analyze the principals and beliefs in Judaism to solidify its truth in his or her own mind. A person who simply views his or her practice of Judaism as coincidence will receive the same punishments that are promised to non-followers which are listed in this week's *parsha*.

This is the reason for the repetition of the word "coincidence;" to alert our people that it is necessary to believe in Hashem and all of Torah and not just merely follow it blindly. Being a religious person is as much about your mindset as your behavior, a message that is crucial to the life of every Jew.

It is very easy to get caught up in life, school, work, and other mundane tasks. It is imperative that we remember that we must constantly engage ourselves in Torah and really search to find meanings behind the things that we have learned in the past. Miracles from small to large are present in this world every day, and it is important that we remember to thank Hashem and to take time to strengthen our own religious beliefs. This will ensure that our faith in Hashem should never fall to mere coincidence.

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