

Candle Lighting

7:35

S”Z Kriat Shema

9:22

Sunset

7:54

Motzei

Shabbat

8:31



Parshat HaShavuah

בהר-בחקתי

BEHAR-  
BECHUKOTAI  
MAY 4, 2013

כ"ד אייר תשע"ג

A PUBLICATION OF



# Ashreinu

חלקינו מה טוב

Enriching and Enhancing Your Study of the Weekly Torah Portion

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## LUCKY SEVEN

MRS. AMY HOROWITZ

The first of this week's two parshiyot, Parshat Behar, introduces the mitzvah of shmita, the obligation to let our fields lie fallow for an entire year once every seven years. After detailing the rules of both shmita and yovel, the Torah concludes with the promise that the land will yield fruit and that we will eat until we are satisfied.

In other words, despite the stress we might feel about neglecting our fields for a year, watching our precious fruit rot and drop off the trees, Hashem reassures us that we will have plenty to eat.

Immediately following this guarantee, the Torah raises the possibility that we will still be worried, despite Hashem's promise of satiety: *"vechi tomru: mah nochal be'shana ha'shevi'it?"*—"And if you will say: what will we eat in the seventh year?" The Torah responds with another reassurance that Hashem will bless the sixth year and there will be enough food to satisfy us for years six, seven, and even eight!

Ramban is troubled by the wording of the question that the pasuk suggests we will ask: "What will we eat in the seventh year?" Even with only the most basic understanding of farming, I can assume that there will be some crops that are grown towards the end of year six that I can harvest immediately before the shmita year begins and then eat during year seven!

Year seven, the shmita year, is not the year we should be worried about! We'll eat carefully in year six, we'll jar our fruits and pickle our vegetables, and with some clever rationing we'll be well taken care of for year seven. The year we should really be worried about is the following year, year eight! Since we did no farming or harvesting during the shmita year, by the time year eight rolls around, we can legitimately worry that our pantries are empty!

Continued page 4





## TRUTH SPEAKER MATTHEW SILKIN ('14)

Politicians are not known for being the most honest of people. From extreme cases such as the Watergate scandal in 1972—in which President Richard Nixon was accused of tapping the phone lines in the Democratic party HQ—to the fallacy of the campaign promise, it seems that politicians like to say whatever is on their minds at the time, without thinking about the repercussions of promising someone something that they cannot get.

This week's double portion, Behar-Bechukotai, opens with the laws of shmita and yovel. In short, every seventh year is a shmita year, in which no crops can be harvested, and every fiftieth year is a yovel year, in which not only can no crops be harvested but all land returns to the original owner. Now, while the laws themselves are pretty understandable—I mean, the land needs some rest too—the way the Torah introduces these laws is quite strange. The Torah decides to open this week's portion not with the usual “וידבר ה' אל משה לאמר,” but with an extra few words: “בהר סיני,” at Har Sinai. Two questions can be asked about this. One: we know that we are at Har Sinai, we have not moved since the end of Parshat Beshalach, a sefer and a half ago! And two: why are shmita and yovel so special that they are the two mitzvot specifically listed as being given at Har Sinai?

The Chasam Sofer gives an interesting answer to this question. Hashem concludes the law of shmita by promising an abundance of food in the sixth year. Now, if any old Joe Shmoe were to make that same promise, he would be the laughingstock of the city. Hashem, as we all know, is not “any old Joe Shmoe.” If Hashem promises something to us, we know that He will keep his promise. This is a mitzvah that is obviously given from Sinai directly from Hashem and not invented by man, for who else would dare make such a promise other than Hashem alone.

This teaches us a profound lesson. Often, we tend to make promises that we just can not keep. Not only is this borderline lying, but it makes one lose a lot of respect in the eyes of his peers. If we try harder to keep our promises, then everyone can benefit in the long run—other people are getting what you promised them, and you are gaining people's trust. Only then can we function not just as a society, but as a community.

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## TWO SIDES OF THE SAME COIN JAKE TOKAYER ('16)

This week's parshiyot are Behar-Bechukotai. When we read these parshiyot, we might take notice that something is out of the ordinary. Knowing how the Torah works, however, it's pretty ordinary to have something out of the ordinary! These pesukim discuss that if Bnei Yisrael do not follow the Torah, then Hashem will cause evil to rise up amongst them. However, immediately following these harrowing words, the Torah delineates the brachot that will come from living a Torah-observant life. Now for the major question...what links these two?

The answer is as follows, if a man does not follow the Torah then he is punished. However, only seeing the negative half of the Torah would place an emphasis on fearing Hashem rather than loving Hashem. The reason for the happy ending is to encourage Bnei Yisrael to do the right thing in life. The Torah is not only about hellfire and damnation, but also includes the positive aspects of following Hashem's commandments. So, when we look to follow in the ways of Hashem, we must seek to do so not only to avoid punishment, but also to better ourselves and bring G-dliness into this world.





## DOUBLE NEGATIVE

### SIMCHA STADLAN ('16)

In the second of this week's parshiyot, Parshat Bechukotai, we read of the blessings and curses given to us as consequences for our actions. When reading the first half of Parshat Bechukotai, one will notice that the curses outnumber the blessings. As we know that Hashem is a benevolent G-d, why does He present us more curses than blessings? Does Hashem not want to encourage His people rather than discourage us?

Some rabbis suggest that the curses should not be scowled upon, because positive aspects can be found in the seemingly negative curses. In the Midrash Tanchuma, Rabbi Shmuel explains that the blessings begin with the letter *alef* in "אם בחוקתי תלכו" (Vayikra 26:1) and end with the letter *taf* in "ואולך אתכם קוממיות" (Vayikra 26:13), while the curses begin with the letter *vav* in "וואם לא תשמעו" (Vayikra 26:14) and end with a *heh* in "ביד משה" (Vayikra 26:43). Though there are more curses than blessings, the writing reveals that there is an entire alphabet of blessings from א to ת—a boundless number of blessings. On the other hand, the pesukim listing the curses exhibit an absence of the alphabet, from ו to ה, and therefore an absence of curses. Rabbi Shmuel therefore demonstrates how there are an endless amount of blessings, while there are a limited number of punishments.

Moreover, the rabbis teach that it is possible to understand the curses with a positive outlook. For example, Rashi describes how "והשמתי אני את הארץ" ("I will make the land desolate," Vayikra 26:32) can be a positive situation because Israel's enemies would not desire to conquer the land if it is desolate. Many of the pesukim listing the curses can be interpreted differently with a positive spin.

Furthermore, the curses should not be taken as severe punishments but as fatherly admonishments. All of the curses are associated with the physical, material world, like no food or rain, instead of spiritual punishments like *kareit*, being cut off from the Jewish people. Aware of the types of curses listed, we can understand that these curses are not meant to hurt us but are to help us reach out and come closer to Hashem. If the curses were to be spiritual punishments, like *kareit*, the sinner would not have any inclination to return to Judaism and repent since he is already "cut off." However, when Hashem retracts our physical necessities, the sinner is moved to pray to Hashem for his bodily needs, like food and water.

Lastly, as we see in Jewish history, punishments and rebuke are required to realign the Jewish people on a path of Torah and mitzvot. The curses are listed to urge and pressure us to follow Hashem's commandments. The fear of Hashem and his penalties outweighs the awe of Hashem and his blessings as a pressure to act according to the Torah; therefore, more curses are necessary in the parsha.

As the holiday of Shavuot is approaching, we read the curses in Parshat Bechukotai to remind us of our sins and wrongdoings so that we may aptly prepare for "זמן מתן תורתנו"—the receiving of the Torah. Every day of the Omer we must work on ourselves and reawaken our desire to live a Torah lifestyle. The first pasuk of the parsha states "אם בחוקתי תלכו"—we must walk in the way of Hashem in order to receive the blessings listed in our parsha and not the curses. According to the Gemara (Sotah 14a), "in order to fulfill walking in Hashem's ways one should emulate God's acts of clothing the naked, visiting the sick, comforting mourners etc." The curses are presented to encourage us—and not discourage us—to perform acts of kindness and chesed, follow the mitzvot and commandments, and walk in the way of Hashem because our Father and Creator knows what is best for us.





# WALK THE WALK

## ARI MAZOR ('14)

This week, in Parshat Bechukotai, we come across the pasuk: "If you walk in my statutes, and keep my commandments, and do them" (Vayikra 26:3). This pasuk is followed by the brachot and the *tochacha*, giving the impression that the above verse is strictly a connecting statement between decree and consequence. The second part of the phrase, "keep my commandments and do them," clearly suggests that a Jew must perform the actions as decreed; thus, it makes sense to place such a statement before the list of blessings and curses brought about by the Jewish people's performance or negligence of the mitzvot. However, the first phrase, "If you walk..." is rather vague, lacking the clear and concrete instructions found in the subsequent part of the pasuk.

This, according to many, is because the beginning of the pasuk does not serve to affirm the requirement to perform mitzvot, rather it affirms the credibility of the mitzvot. The mitzvot compose the path that we as Jews must walk, the path of Hashem. We must understand our connection to the mitzvot, as well as their undeniable legitimacy, to truly "keep the commandments", "do them," and walk in the ways of Hashem.

*Mrs. Horowitz continued*

In answer to his own question, the Ramban explains that we have to re-read our pasuk with slightly different punctuation or grammar. Instead of reading it as, "And if you will say: what will we eat in the seventh year," we have to read it as, "And if you will say in the seventh year: what will we eat?" Ramban is suggesting that it won't be until some point during the seventh year that we will begin to wonder what we will eat in the upcoming year number eight.

Rav Moshe Feinstein offers a different insight. He posits that we are having trouble understanding the question, "What will we eat in the seventh year" because it really is a stupid question! Of course we will have enough to eat in year seven! Rav Moshe then suggests that asking what we will eat in the eighth year is ALSO a stupid question! In fact, worrying at all about what we will eat, when the Torah has already guaranteed us that we will have more than enough, is completely ridiculous. Just like we will certainly have enough food in year number seven, we will certainly have enough food in year number eight.

Therefore, says Rav Moshe, the pasuk includes the most obviously silly question ("What will we eat in the seventh year?") to demonstrate that asking any such question is silly. We are a people of faith. We trust Hashem to take care of us and to always have our best interests at heart.

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7902 Montoya Circle  
Boca Raton, FL 33433  
Phone: 561-417-7422  
Fax: 561-417-7028  
www.wyhs.net