

The Narrow Bridge

גשר צר מאוד

PARSHA PERSPECTIVES

Short Divrei Torah on Parshas Bechukosai

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רפואה שלמה פעסל בת גאלדא / לזכות חילינו

EVERLASTING ENGRAVEMENT

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"If you will go in My statutes and observe My commandments and perform them..." (26:3)

Hashem's "rules" are those commandments that defy rational explanation. The word for "rule" in Hebrew (chukah) actually means "engraved." When a letter is engraved onto something, the letter becomes a permanent part of it. (This is not the case when a letter is written on something, for then the letter remains a separate entity from it.)

In the same way, it is by observing Hashem's rules that we truly unite with Him. The reason for this is because just as letters are engraved in stone by removing what was there before, observing Hashem's rules requires us to "remove" - i.e., negate - our egos. With our egos out of the way, we can connect to Hashem in the fullest way possible.

This is why Hashem made His blessings dependent especially on our observance of these types of commandments. When we empty ourselves of our ego, we can view Hashem's rewards not as the motivation for complying with His will, but as intrinsic components of our relationship with Him.

Hashem is absolute goodness, so when we relate to Him without the interference of our egos, we can experience His goodness purely, as His self-revelation to us. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 22, pp. 159-165) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

ON THE GO

Reb Simcha Bunim of Pshischa

"If you will go in My statutes and observe My commandments and perform them..." (26:3)

One must never stay stagnant; they must constantly "go" higher and higher, never remaining on one level.

ONLY WHEN APPROPRIATE

Reb Yitzchak of Vorka

"If you will go in My statutes and observe My commandments and perform them..." (26:3)

If you are occupied with the study of the Torah. (Rashi)

It is written in Tehillim (119:59): "I considered my ways and turned my feet to Your testimonies." Dovid said: Every day when I planned to go to a certain place or to a certain dwelling, I would walk, and my feet would lead me to houses of worship and houses of study. (Midrash)

The Hebrew word "אם" can be rendered either as "if" or as "whether." This implies that even if one is about to perform a good deed or observe a commandment one must first carefully consider whether it is fitting to do it and whether the time is appropriate.

There are some commandments meant only for scholars, and others - such as bearing the Holy Ark and taking apart the Mishkan - that scholars are not meant to perform. Likewise, if a man dons his prayer shawl and tefillin to pray in the morning immediately after rising from bed without first performing the proper preparatory rites, he has not observed the commandment properly.

Hence, one must be scrupulous whether and how the commandment should be performed. "I considered my ways," Dovid said, and only thereafter "turned my feet to Your testimonies."

WALKING WITH HASHEM

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

"If you will go in My statutes and observe My commandments and perform them..." (26:3)

Our parashah starts by stating, "If you walk in [follow] My statutes..." and then goes on to disclose the rewards. Why does the Torah use the verb "walk" when describing the expectation to abide by the laws of the Torah?

The Ohr HaChaim suggests that walking in the laws of the Torah leads to forward progress and a growth mindset. Whether embracing the positive mitzvos or upholding and living by the restrictions, we actively flex our growth muscles. Our methodical dissection and analysis of the intricacies of the text - down to a single word - "teleichu" (walk, follow) help us reach the ultimate goal of strengthening our connection to G-d and improving all aspects of our lives.

KEEP IT MOVING

Rabbi Moshe Schochet

"If you will go in My statutes and observe My commandments and perform them..." (26:3)

The Chiddushei HaRim points out that the word *teleichu*, which means "to go," highlights a fundamental ingredient of serving Hashem in the best way possible. He explains that if one wants to develop a strong connection to Hashem, one has to constantly be on the go. Stagnancy and inertia will only have negative effects on one's growth. A person has to continually position themselves to progress forward.

The Chiddushei HaRim is teaching us a very powerful lesson. Yiddishkeit is like an escalator; you are either going up or you are going down. There is no such thing as staying put. We must constantly push ourselves to grow and develop if we want our relationship with Hashem to have eternal and everlasting meaning. There is simply no off button or vacation from observing the Torah. Let us take this message to heart so that we cement a relationship with Hashem that will stand the test of time.

PHYSICAL SPIRITUALITY

Reb Noson of Breslov

"If you will go in My statutes and observe My commandments and perform them... I will provide you with rains in their seasons." (26:3-4)

"If you walk in My statutes" refers to toiling in Torah study. (Rashi)

Why does the Torah promise material blessing for spiritual achievements?

Indeed, the body and soul are separate entities, and the soul is the more important of the two. Yet a soul cannot attain spiritual heights by itself-it needs a physical body to act as a restraint against spirituality, in order for the person to remain in a physical world while engaging in spiritual devotions. Eating keeps body and soul together so that spiritual growth is possible.

Rebbe Nachman teaches that if a person is meritorious and strives to find Hashem, his eating can elevate him to a level of desire and will for Hashem that transcends many, many other spiritual attainments. In such a case, his physical desires not only support his spiritual longings, but actually mirror those longings!

Why does rain, a material benefit, constitute the reward for Torah study and mitzvos?

Rain signifies the World to Come. It corresponds to a transcendental intellect that descends to us and becomes part of our lives. (Likutei Halachot IV, p. 79a)

RAINING DOWN MITZVOS

Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

"I will provide you with rains in their seasons..." (26:4)

The context of the verse implies that it is referring to the reward for the observance of mitzvos, but this is difficult to understand. Do our Sages (Kiddushin 39b) not teach that in this world there is no reward for a mitzvah?

We can answer based on what is stated in Pirkei Avos (4:2): "The reward of a mitzvah is another mitzvah." This means that since there can be no true reward for the observance of a mitzvah in this world, its only recompense can be the opportunity to perform yet another mitzvah; that one mitzvah brings another in its train.

This, then, is the underlying meaning of the promise "I will give your rains in their time." Rain brings blessings to the world and makes it more materially prosperous, enabling each and every person to give charity. The verse thus expresses the principle that the reward for a mitzvah is another mitzvah, as one mitzvah brings another mitzvah in its train.

TANGIBLE RESULTS

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"I will provide you with rains in their seasons..." (26:4)

The rewards that the Torah promises in this passage are almost entirely material ones. Why is there almost no mention of spiritual reward?

Let us note that when people are profoundly affected by some occurrence, they express themselves physically - by smiling, clapping, dancing, crying, and the like. This is because when the core of our being has been touched, the effect is felt throughout our entire self, including our physical bodies.

Similarly, rather than superficial or rote performance, G-d wants us ideally to observe His commandments in a way that touches our very core, affecting us profoundly and making us into better people. When we achieve this deep unity with G-d and His Torah, our entire being is affected, even the physical aspects of our lives. In order to indicate that this is the case, the results must also be physical. Thus, the material rewards spoken of in this passage are not only an incentive to keep G-d's commandments but are meant to teach us how we should keep them, namely, allowing them to touch us so profoundly that our observance produces tangible results. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 37, pp. 79-84) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

PROMOTING GROWTH

Koznitzer Rebbe

"I will provide you with rains in their seasons, and the land will give its produce and the tree of the field will give its fruit." (26:4)

Just as a field requires plowing, sowing, rain, and warmth to produce fruit, so too does a person need preparation, intention, and fervor to reach the proper service of Hashem.

WHOLESOME INFLUENCE

Novominsker Rebbe

"I will provide you with rains in their seasons, and the land will give its produce and the tree of the field will give its fruit." (26:4)

These trees, which do not bear fruit, are destined to produce fruit. (Rashi)

When a person is thorough and pure in his actions and persists in that manner, he is able to influence and improve his environs and intensify their sense of holiness.

The pasuk teaches that when we "go in My decrees," when we perform the mitzvos, we develop a wholesomeness in ourselves and become righteous in our ways and deeds. This attitude permits us to influence our surroundings, even "the trees that do not bear fruit," so that even the sinners will begin to repent and permit their fruit (offspring) to grow.

Then "I will provide peace in the land, and you will lie down with none to frighten you... and a sword will not cross your land" (26:6). The outcome of such influence will be so powerful that the enemies' sword will not disturb the serving of Hashem and the holiness of the actions.

TRUE WEALTH

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

"You will eat your bread to satiety and dwell securely in your land..." (26:5)

One of the blessings that Hashem promises us for learning His Torah and following His Mitzvos is that we will eat our bread to satiety (Vayikra 26:3 with Rashi).

Rashi explains that the blessing of "satisfaction" is that "even within the stomach there will be a blessing" (Vayikra 25:19) which means that one will be satiated despite only eating a small amount. (Mizrachi)

The ability to be satisfied by a small amount is truly a blessing, as it says in Pirkei Avos (4:1), "Who is rich? One who is happy with what he has." This means that even a person with enormous wealth can actually be considered poor, whereas someone without any money at all can be considered rich; it all depends on their mindset.

Rav Noach Weinberg would ask his students "Would you sell me your eyes for ten million dollars?" When the student would answer in the negative, he would say, "So you should know that you're a multi-millionaire. Look at the gift that Hashem has given you!"

Rav Noach would continue to say, "And if you received a phone call that you had won the jackpot in the national lottery draw and you were on your way to collect your one hundred-million dollar check (tax free), and as you were driving, someone cut you up on the road. Would you get angry? Would you scream out of the window 'Hey, learn how to drive!' No, you're a multi-millionaire, you're on cloud nine, and no one can get you down. No one can take the smile from your face. Well, this should be all of us. We've been given gifts worth millions of dollars. Surely that is something to always smile about and not let anyone get you down, whatever they do to you."

One can find an interesting hint to this concept within the word "עשיר - Rich" (as in "Who is rich?"), an acronym for: עינים, שיניים, ידיים, רגלים - Eyes, Teeth, Hands, Legs

HOLY TRANSFORMATION

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"I will remove [harmful] wild beasts from the land." (26:6)

This blessing will come to its fullest fruition in the Messianic era, when "the wolf will lie with the lamb" in peace. There will indeed still be wolves, but they will not be predatory.

Both in order to ready ourselves for the Messianic future and in order to hasten its arrival, we should try to live "Messianic" lives now to the fullest extent possible. Therefore, instead of destroying the wild and untamed elements of ourselves and of our world, we should transform them and use them for goodness. - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

PEACE IN THE WORLD

Ohr HaChaim

"I will provide peace in the land, and you shall lie down and none shall make you afraid..." (26:6)

Ba'aretz may be rendered either as "in the land" or as "in the world." Hence, this pasuk may be interpreted to mean that "when there will be peace in the world, you, too, O Israel, will be able to sleep in peace and none shall make you afraid."

PREREQUISITE OF PEACE

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"I will provide peace in the land..." (26:6)

Rashi states that all the blessings of prosperity mentioned in the previous verses are worthless unless we are blessed with peace.

This is true in our personal lives as well. We cannot begin to make use of the gifts of wealth, family, health, and talents with which G-d has blessed us unless we are first at peace with ourselves and those around us.

Our minds and hearts are battlefields of conflicting ideas and emotions, the people closest to us all have divergent needs and agendas, and the world at large is a cacophony of voices pulling everyone in different directions. We will therefore be too confused and distracted to accomplish anything unless we possess a strategy for reconciling all these competing forces.

That strategy is the Torah, whose “ways are ways of pleasantness and all its paths are peace” (Mishlei 3:17). The Torah teaches us how to subdue our material drives to our spiritual drives, giving our lives clarity and unity of purpose. When our family lives are guided by the Torah's values, there is domestic harmony. Strong foundations of personal and family peace enable us to then promote peace in society both by means of our personal, inspiring example and by disseminating Divine consciousness. (Hitva'aduyot 5743, vol. 3, pp. 1461-1462, 1469-1471, 1484-1487) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

UNITING THE SPARKS

Rebbe Nachman

“I will provide peace in the land... and a sword will not pass through...” (26:6)

When people are fragmented due to strife, the sparks of holiness are scattered throughout the world.

But when people speak words of Torah and prayer, these holy sparks are united and elevated, and peace may be attained. (See Likutey Moharan I, 75-B:3)

PEACEFUL PURSUIT

Reb Noson of Breslov

“You will pursue your enemies and they will fall before you by the sword...” (26:7)

Is it a blessing to pursue one's enemies? Wouldn't peace be a better blessing, so that one can toil in Torah and serve Hashem in tranquility?

The goal and desire of each and every person should be to spread G-dliness. This blessing affords us that opportunity, helping us merit to such a great spiritual level that we can actually go out and “pursue our enemies” in order to draw them close to Hashem.

“They will fall before you by the sword” - the sword represents prayer (see Rashi on Bereishis 48:22). Through our prayers and words of truth, we will be able to reveal the truth of Hashem to others. (Likutey Halakhot V, p. 214a)

THE MORE, THE MERRIER

Reb Noson of Breslov

“Five of you will pursue a hundred, and a hundred of you will pursue ten thousand...” (26:8)

There is no comparison between a few people doing a mitzvah and many people performing a mitzvah. Thus, where only five can pursue 100 (twenty times their number), 100 can pursue 10,000 (100 times their number). (Rashi)

Sefer Yetzirah (4:12) states that two stones build two houses (i.e., combinations), three stones create six houses, and four stones make twenty-four houses. Rebbe Nachman teaches that these stones represent souls, implying that the more people who join together to do a mitzvah, the more the power of that mitzvah multiplies (see Likutey Moharan II, 8:6).

This teaching also applies to donating to a worthy cause. Even if one is not able to do a mitzvah himself, he can assist others to do it by supporting them with his charity. In this way, he increases the number of people involved in the mitzvah. (Likutey Halakhot VII, p. 157a)

QUANTUM LEAPS

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“I will walk among you; I will be your G-d and you will be My people.” (26:12)

To “walk” with someone means to have a dynamic, progressing relationship with them. In order for G-d to continuously enhance His relationship to us in this manner, we have to enhance our relationship with Him in a similar manner. The Torah therefore tells us that this “walking” relationship with G-d is possible only “if you advance in My rules” (verse 13) i.e., through studying the Torah assiduously - beyond what is merely required of us.

Someone in love with something or someone will not be satisfied with a superficial acquaintance with the object of his love, but will obsessively seek to enhance his knowledge of it or them as much as he possibly can. Similarly, aware that the Torah is G-d's will and wisdom, our love of Him will make us seek to enhance our relationship with Him by plumbing the depths of the Torah as deeply as we possibly can.

Lest we think that making quantum leaps in our relationship with G-d is beyond our ability, G-d reminds us here that “I am Hashem, your G-d, who brought you out of Egypt,” which means “who brought you out of all limitations.”

In other words, although making quantum leaps requires our effort, our ability to do this is a gift from G-d. (Sefer HaMa'amarim 5738 (ed. 5762), pp. 275-285) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

STANDING TALL

The Maggid of Mezeritch

"...and I have made you go upright." (26:13)

Erect in stature. (Rashi)

Cattle walk with head bent to the ground. When humans act like animals then their heads, too, are bent down toward the lower, baser things of life. But if people do not behave like animals they are said to walk upright, with head erect and turned heavenward. "If you follow My statutes," says Hashem (pasuk 3), "I will indeed cause you to go upright."

BLESSINGS IN DISGUISE

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"And if you will not obey Me..." (26:14)

In the Talmud (Moed Katan 9b), we are told that Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai sent his son, Rabbi Eleazar, to be blessed by some of the sages. They bestowed upon him what sounded like a string of curses. Only when he returned to his father did his father explain to him how all these "curses" were really blessings in disguise.

We, too, can learn how to decipher what we experience in our own lives as G-d's curses, seeing them for what they truly are - sublime but hidden blessings. Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, who deciphered his colleagues "curses," is the author of the Zohar, the basic text of the inner dimension of the Torah. This teaches us that the study of the Torah's inner dimension trains us to perceive the inner dimension of reality in general, including the inner dimension of G-d's apparent curses.

Once we are aware that G-d's curses are really blessings, we can instinctively fulfill the sages' counsel to "rejoice in suffering" (Shabbos 88b). By framing these "curses" positively, removing them from the negative light in which we originally saw them, we allow their inner goodness to be fully revealed. This, in turn, will transform them from apparent evil into revealed goodness. (Tanya, chapter 26; Igeret HaKodesh 11, 22; Likutei Sichot, vol. 7, p. 233, vol. 19, pp. 136-139) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

PROTECTIVE WARNING

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

"And if you will not obey Me and you will not fulfill all of these commandments, if you despise My statutes..." (26:14-15)

Mashal: A certain trail wound around a dangerous road on a very high and narrow mountain, on which one could easily trip and fall off the cliff. In addition, many wild animals were stalking in the area and the whole path had many pitfalls.

One person who was aware of the serious dangers involved in traveling on that path was very nervous about trekking it. After thinking over the matter, he came up with an original solution for his fears. He would walk blindfolded! He would thus not be able to see the great dangers that surrounded him from all sides and would remain calm.

Anyone with a drop of sense can easily see how this "solution" just adds to the problem without solving anything at all. He is now in even greater danger than before since he will be unaware of his true situation.

Nimshal: Similarly, says the holy Chafetz Chaim zt'l, there are people who are afraid to read the section of the Tochachah, the warning of retribution for failure to keep the Torah. In some shuls the person who reads the Torah in public reads it in a very low voice, and some people even walk out of shul when this is read. But merely avoiding the issue of improper behavior is not correct. By realizing the consequences of transgressions and the failure to act properly, one will watch his behavior and will gain immensely.

ONE THING LEADS TO ANOTHER

HaDerash VeHalyun

"And if you will not obey Me and you will not fulfill all of these commandments, if you despise My statutes..." (26:14-15)

Those who seek to cast off the Torah's yoke and the commandments begin by rejecting the "statutes" of the Torah on the grounds that they have no logical reason or purpose. Humans, they claim, cannot be forced to do things for which they can find no good reason. But this is only an excuse, for from the "statutes" one proceeds to reject also those commandments for which there are logical reasons because their aim is nothing less than to break the yoke of the Torah.

Hashem says to the Jews: "And if you reject My statutes" - you will begin by rejecting My statutes, the laws for which you can find no obvious reason. Next, "your soul abhors My ordinances" - and you will not want to observe even those commandments that have logical reasons, because it is your intention "that you will not perform all My commandments but break My covenant."

HIDDEN BLESSINGS

Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

"I will dispense panic upon you..." (26:16)

[Concealed in G-d's maledictions are truly great blessings, for "evil does not emanate from the mouth of the Most High" (Eichah 3:38). A number of the verses in the tochachah (rebuke) can therefore be interpreted in their truest sense, as tremendous blessings.]

The word for “dispense” (והפקדתי) can also denote a void or absence, as in the verse (I Shmuel 20:15) “Dovid's place was vacant (ויפקד).” In other words, if we read the verse this way, it actually promises us that G-d will remove panic and all the other forms of affliction mentioned in this section of the Torah. They will not happen to us.

The Torah continues, “You will sow your seed in vain,” for the Land of Israel is destined in the times of Mashiach to yield ready-baked loaves and fine clothing (Shabbos 30b). Thus, sowing will be pointless, since there will be no need to sow seeds. Only our enemies will still have to sow their seeds.

THE TRUE OWNER

Chashavah L’Tovah

“Then the land will be paid her Sabbaticals...” (26:34)

Of all the laws of the Torah, what makes the law of the Sabbatical year so important that its violation is named as a cause of Israel’s exile?

The observance of the Sabbatical year is meant to make us understand that the whole world belongs to Hashem, Who is the sole true Owner of all the land in it. If we conduct ourselves in accordance with Hashem’s will, Hashem gives us a lease on the land, renewable every seventh year. But if we defy Hashem by not observing the Sabbatical year, we thereby indicate that we regard ourselves as the sole proprietor of the land on which we dwell, and then Hashem, the true Owner, has no other choice but to drive us from the land to teach us that it is not ours at all.

BOLD CONFESSIONS

Reb Noson of Breslov

“They will confess their sins...” (26:40)

A sinner should feel deep humiliation before Hashem. Yet that very humiliation may stop him from standing before Hashem and confessing his sin. Therefore, our confessional prayers are prefaced by the statement, “We are not so brazenfaced or obstinate as to say before You, ‘Hashem our Lord and G-d of our fathers, we are righteous and have not sinned,’ for we and our fathers have sinned” (Confessional liturgy). That is, we acknowledge that we should have had the humility not to sin. But since we were brazen enough to commit the sin, we now wish to transform that brazenness into boldness by standing before Hashem and confessing it.

Both humility and boldness are required to serve Hashem. One must be humble and recognize his Creator. If he sins, he must not wallow in false humility, saying that he cannot now return to Hashem. Rather, he must strengthen himself with boldness and ask Hashem to forgive him and draw him close, despite his past deeds. (Likutey Halakhot VII, p. 26a)

“Take with you words and return to Hashem.” (Hoshea 14:3)

“Take with you words” - for the words are already prepared before Hashem. Your confession is known, and He wants you to return to Him.

The words are by Him! Just turn to Him and you will be able to take those words and repent. (Likutey Halakhot I, p. 169a)

A sin is a perversion of the words and laws of the Torah. One who confesses his sins before Hashem turns his twisted version of the Torah into prayers, thereby rectifying the Torah that he blemished. (Likutey Halakhot III, p. 101a)

THE LAND IS OUR LAND

Rabbi Efreim Goldberg

“Then I will remember My covenant with Yaakov, and My covenant with Yitzchak, and also My covenant with Avraham will I remember; and I will remember the Land.” (26:42)

Parshas Bechukosai features the תוכחה, the list of dreadful calamities that Hashem warns will befall Am Yisrael if they disobey His commands. This section ends on an encouraging note, assuring us that even if Hashem is forced to exile us from Eretz Yisrael and subject us to oppression on account of our wrongdoing, ultimately, He will remember His covenant with the Avos and will bring us back: “Then I will remember My covenant with Yaakov, and My covenant with Yitzchak, and also My covenant with Avraham will I remember; and I will remember the Land.”

The Chasam Sofer raises the question as to what Hashem means when He says that He will remember the land. We understand that He will remember the promises made to Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov, and rescue us from exile on account of those assurances. But in what sense does Hashem “remember” the land?

The Chasam Sofer offers a fascinating answer, explaining that Hashem here tells us that He will hear the land’s prayers. Eretz Yisrael itself weeps, as it were, when the Jewish Nation is in exile. It cries, “I am waiting for you, I am longing for you, I want you back here.”

The connection between Am Yisrael and Eretz Yisrael is so strong that the land in a sense feels and is saddened by our absence. Not only are we incomplete without the land - the land is incomplete without us.

Whatever our reasons are for not living in Israel, aliya must always be a question of “when” and not a question of “if.” We must remember that we all belong there, and that even if we have valid reasons for living in the Diaspora, we are to hear the land’s cries and resolve to return when the right time comes.

ROYAL RESPONSIBILITY

Shelah HaKadosh

“Then I will remember My covenant with Yaakov, and My covenant with Yitzchak, and also My covenant with Avraham will I remember; and I will remember the Land.” (26:42)

What relationship does this promise have to the predictions of punishment directly preceding it?

It is placed into this context to show us that our illustrious ancestry - our descent from Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov - makes our sinful conduct even more reprehensible.

This can be compared to the case of a noble family's child, reared in the royal palace, who then becomes guilty of a transgression against the king's law. His transgression is considered much more serious than the same act committed by a peasant reared in a village hut.

A TIME FOR KINDNESS

Kedushas Tzion

“Then I will remember My covenant with Yaakov, and My covenant with Yitzchak, and also My covenant with Avraham will I remember; and I will remember the Land.” (26:42)

The Avos are not mentioned in chronological order in the tochachah (rebuke), but rather in the order of the attributes and eras they personified.

After the Torah was given, the Jews entered the “era of Torah,” personified by Yaakov who was the pillar of Torah.

When the Holy Temple was built, they entered the “era of service” and Yitzchak embodied the attribute of avodah.

Finally, these last generations - the “era of kindness” - before Mashiach are connected to Avraham who was the epitome of loving-kindness.

The Baal Shem Tov explained that now, in the final era before Mashiach, emphasis must be placed on deeds of kindness to hasten the Redemption.

SAVED BY DESIRE

Reb Noson of Breslov

“Despite all this, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not despise them or detest them to the point of destroying them and breaking My covenant with them. For I am Hashem their Lord.” (26:44)

Lekhalotam (לכלתם, to destroy them) also implies Khalah (כלה, desire and yearning).

Hashem is saying: “Even though you have sinned, I do not despise you, because you still desire to serve Me.” (Likutey Halakhot V, p. 219a)

HEARTFELT PLEA

Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

“I will remember for them the covenant of the forebears, those whom I have taken out of the land of Egypt...” (26:45)

Almighty G-d, what is Your complaint about us that we do not follow the ways of the Torah? I want to remind You that the Israelites that You took out of Egypt were no better. That is what Dovid HaMelech said (Tehillim 74:2): “Remember Your congregation, which You acquired long ago.”

In arranging a proposal for marriage that involves finance, the future in-law has a right to know that the groom comes from a poor family and to be angry if he was not informed. If it was known beforehand that the groom is poor and the in-law agrees to the proposal, he really has no complaint.

Remind Yourself, Almighty G-d, the circumstances we were in when you took us out of Egypt. We were without anything; we had no Torah, no mitzvos, and we did not have any good deeds. Nevertheless, You freed us and consented to the proposal. If this is so, then what is Your complaint against us? We are no different than before.

FATHERLY LOVE

Reb Naftali of Ropshitz

“These are the decrees, the ordinances, and the Torahs that Hashem gave, between himself and the Children of Israel...” (26:46)

The pasuk teaches us about the mercy and loving-kindness of Hashem. The entire series of admonitions were given between the Almighty and His people. It is like a father scolding his child. He will tell him how he will be punished unless he amends his ways, but He will not scold him in front of others. In front of others he will praise his child.

The Sages said that the Blessed One knows the reproof but will have mercy afterwards and not bring the punishment. The good that Hashem has promised, He will keep; but the bad He is ready to retract.

KNOW YOUR WORTH

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

“When a person articulates a vow of endowment of lives...” (27:2)

Parashas Bechukosai contains the unpleasant rebuke and punishment should people not follow the Torah's laws. What follows is the law for someone who vows to donate the value of a human and what value to assign to those vows (27:1-7). Why would that follow the rebuke when it belongs with the detailed laws listed in previous parshiyos?

The Kotzker Rebbe explains that after harsh rebuke, it's easy to lose one's self-esteem. To counter that, the Torah goes into great detail specifying everyone's intrinsic value, regardless of the degree to which they follow the guidelines of the Torah.

I believe there is another positive message: the laws are specific only to one who verbally commits to the amount of another's value. Not only does this show the importance of valuing others, it also shows the value of our words.

The Torah is comforting us: not only are our words eminently significant and add value to ourselves and to the world, but we are also worthy and have our own intrinsic value.

VALUABLE EQUALITY

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"When a person articulates a vow of endowment of lives..." (27:2)

[Hashem instructed Moshe regarding the various forms of donations that individuals may make to the Temple or to the priests. One type of donation is when someone pledges the monetary "endowment-value" of a person or article. These values are fixed, varying only with regard to the age and gender of the individuals, without regard to their pedigree, achievements, or abilities.]

The laws of endowments is one of those areas in which the Torah emphasizes the class equality of the Jewish people. There are indeed many times when tribal affiliation, inborn talents, or hard-earned achievements serve to differentiate us and qualify or disqualify us for certain roles. But at the same time, our differences must not be allowed to overshadow our basic equality, which is ultimately based on the fact that we all possess a Divine soul, which endows us all with infinite worth. (Sichot Kodesh 5738, vol. 2, pp. 359-360) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniefsky

TREAT THEM WELL

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"If a man consecrates part of his inherited field to Hashem..." (27:16)

Why should the Torah allow us to give to the Temple or to its priests possessions that Hashem has granted us? Isn't this being ungrateful to Hashem, or perhaps shirking the responsibility that He has placed upon us by putting these resources at our disposal?

The answer is that all our possessions really belong to Hashem. He has just entrusted them to our care during our lifetimes in order that we refine them, and in order that by refining them, we refine ourselves and the world. It follows that we have no inherent rights to what we possess; they are not ours to abuse or waste at our discretion.

If this is true of our external possessions, it is true all the more of our talents and our bodies. We must take proper care of them and direct them toward positive ends; they are not ours to abuse or misuse.

And this is true all the more of our children, whom we value even more than ourselves. Our children belong to Hashem, who has entrusted them to our care in order for us to raise them to be good and holy. It is our nature as parents to spare no effort in pursuit of what is best for our children. Our highest priority, then, should be to provide them with a Jewish education, based on the Torah's eternal values. This is the best way to ensure their truest, most lasting happiness. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 22, pp. 166-172) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniefsky

PARADOXICAL SATISFACTION

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"If he consecrates his field after the Jubilee, it will retain value." (27:17)

There are no limits to goodness and holiness. Since G-d is their source, and G-d is infinite, it is always possible to suffuse any physical entity or spiritual pursuit with additional goodness and holiness. Thus, we must never be satisfied with our spiritual achievements or with how much good we have succeeded in doing.

This, however, does not mean that dedicating ourselves to the cause of goodness and holiness will prevent us from ever feeling satisfied or rewarded for our efforts. On the contrary, since only what is good and holy is permanent and valuable, it is only in these matters that we can experience true, lasting satisfaction and pride.

Thus, a life dedicated to goodness and holiness is a life of paradox: on the one hand, never being satisfied - since there is always more to accomplish, and on the other hand, experiencing the greatest satisfaction possible - since our accomplishments are true and permanent. - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniefsky

PURPOSEFUL JOURNEY

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"If someone consecrates to G-d a field that he had purchased, which is not one of his inherited fields..." (27:22)

Our collective and individual Divine mission on earth is to make the world into G-d's true home. We do this by refining our lives and the world at large, making them more conducive to Divine consciousness.

Our main tools in this endeavor are the study of G-d's Torah, the performance of His commandments, and approaching Him in prayer. But in addition, our Divine consciousness should ideally "spill over" into the mundane areas of our lives, transforming them, too, into opportunities to enhance our own Divine consciousness as well as that of the world in general.

When we sanctify our lives in this way, the steps we take on the road to fulfilling our Divine mission are no longer just the means to the end, but become ends themselves. There is purpose and meaning in every act we do, every word we speak, and every thought we think. - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

PROPORTIONATE EVALUATIONS

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

“Every valuation should be made according to the holy shekel...” (27:25)

Although this verse is telling us the financial benchmark in those times, Rav Moshe Sternbuch notes that these words do not merely hint to a valuation, but an evaluation. Specifically, one that many of us are guilty of - double standards. There are often times when we are approached to help someone else: with our time, money, or other resources, yet we excuse ourselves. We're too busy, or we are not in a position to help. Yet, when a more self-gratifying opportunity comes our way, we have all the time in the world to pursue it and can easily find the resources required.

This is particularly true, explains Rav Moshe, when it comes to giving charity. Someone may claim that business is not going so well and therefore decide to cut back on their annual donations, yet, in their private life, they do not make proportional cutbacks - instead, their deficits fall on others' shoulders. On this, Rav Moshe cites the verse above to say that every valuation someone makes for his personal life should be made according to and in proportion with the “holy shekel” - the money he dedicates for charity. When he is carefree on a personal level, he should show the same generosity to others. And only when he tightens his own belt, should he consider doing the same for others.

One person who did not use his dire circumstances as an excuse to forgo his charitable contributions was Richard Lewis (not his real name). Despite his difficult circumstances, he sent the famed “Kollel Chatzos” a check for \$4.50 with an accompanying letter written from Eastern New York Correctional Facility, the maximum security prison where he was incarcerated. The letter explained that although he realized that \$4.50 was not a lot of money, it was as much as he could afford since his earnings in prison amounted to only \$0.17 per hour!

KINGDOM OF PRIESTS

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“No man may consecrate a firstborn animal [as any other type of sacrifice]... since it must be for Hashem.” (27:26)

The final two topics in this section of the Torah are what must be done with our firstborn cattle, sheep, and goats; and with one tenth of our cattle, sheep, and goats in general.

Firstborn animals must be offered up as sacrifices (the priests are given part of their flesh to eat); tithed animals must be eaten in Jerusalem by their owners. These two commandments reflect the two complementary facets of the institution of sacrifices: sanctifying the world and sanctifying ourselves.

As such, these two commandments form a fitting conclusion to the Book of Leviticus, the book in which we hear Hashem calling out to us, challenging us to live life in full awareness of our innate potential as Hashem's chosen people. By so doing, we transform ourselves into “a kingdom of priests,” sanctifying mundane reality. In this way, we fulfill the purpose of Creation: making the world into Hashem's true home. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 17, p. 332-339) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

INCREASING THE BUDGET

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“When someone donates something] from any of his property...” (27:28)

The limit that the sages put on how much we should give to charity is one fifth of our wealth. Giving more than this limit is considered disrespectful to Hashem's gift of prosperity. The exception is if we are approached by a destitute person who needs more than a fifth of our wealth. In such a case, although we are not required to go beyond the usual limit, it is considered extra pious to do so. In cases of danger to life, however, there are no limits; we should give as much as we can. (Arachin 28a; Mishneh Torah, Arachin veCharamim 8:3)

Hashem responds to our actions in accordance with their degree and motivation. Hashem routinely “donates” His normal, limited beneficence to the world; this is His response to our normal, limited charity. When we entreat Him in prayer, begging for His assistance, He “allows” Himself to give us in excess of the amount that He normally “budgets” for our continued existence. If we would only approach Him as captives pleading to be redeemed from our life-threatening exile, He would respond by sparing no “expense” to save us! - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

COUNT YOUR BLESSINGS

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

“All tithes of the herd or flock - of all that passes under the shepherd's staff - every tenth one shall be holy to Hashem.” (27:32)

The Torah describes the last of the tithes called maaser (bechor being the first, maaser the last). Rather than adding up livestock and taking one-tenth as tithe, we are told to let each animal pass through a narrow opening and tag every tenth one. Why is this inefficient way to tithing required?

Rav Hirsch explains that rather than separating out ten percent of our total assets to be donated, counting all our assets as part of this process reframes how we view the totality of our belongings. Not only is attaining wealth a blessing, but keeping and growing it is just as much a blessing. Counting our valuables, rather than focusing on the portion we give away, enables us to appreciate the utility and blessing of all we've been able to accumulate.

BEING PRESENT

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"If he [the owner of the tithed animal] does substitute it, then both it and its replacement will be holy." (27:33)

Sanctifying an animal is a good thing. Why, then, should the Torah forbid the owner to substitute another animal for the original, tithed one, if by doing so both animals become sanctified?

When someone tithed his animals, he was lifted out of his mundane world and drawn into the holy process of having to take the animal to Jerusalem and eat it there with his family. This gave him the opportunity to renew his religious inspiration at the holy Temple. The Torah wants the owner to take advantage of this opportunity and see it through - not to focus on some other, unconsecrated animal.

Normally, we should follow this advice, as well: If we are involved in some holy pursuit, we should stay focused on it. We should not sacrifice our spiritual momentum for some material diversion.

However, when other people are in spiritual danger, we must overlook this prohibition in order to reach out to them. In such cases, the Torah assures us that Hashem will protect us. Both we and those whom we elevate to holiness will indeed remain holy. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 26, pp. 90-92) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

IMCOMPARABLE VALUE

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

"These are the Mitzvos that Hashem commanded Moshe to the Children of Israel on Mount Sinai..." (27:34)

This verse is immediately followed by the account of Hashem speaking with Moshe in the desert. The Baal HaTurim writes that the connection between the commandments mentioned in this verse and the desert in the next, comes to teach us that "If a person does not make himself like a desert, he will not be able to know Torah and Mitzvos."

In order to understand the Baal HaTurim's words, we need to look at the characteristics of a desert. A desert is a place where nothing grows or develops, and when a drop of water is found there, it is cherished as a source of life. So too, a person must make himself like a desert in the sense that he must cherish every word of Torah and every single Mitzvah as if it is his life source, without which he cannot live.

Therefore, the Baal HaTurim is telling us that in order to really "know Torah and Mitzvos," we need to appreciate that every word of Torah and every Mitzvah is of priceless value and cannot be weighed against anything in this world.

This concept is aptly demonstrated in the following story involving the Chofetz Chaim, and his primary student Rav Elchanan Wasserman: In those days, the European Yeshivas suffered tremendous poverty, and Rav Elchanan would often joke that out of the ten measures of poverty that descended to the world, nine of them went to his Yeshiva in Baranovitch.

As a result, he once visited the Chofetz Chaim to offer the following solution.

"The Gemara (Kiddushin 39b) says that there is no reward large enough in this world to repay a Mitzvah. So perhaps we should give up our reward for one second of Torah study to aid the financial plight of the Yeshivas? It will be enough to save all of the Yeshivas and fulfill their financial needs!"

The Chofetz Chaim refused outright, and answered Rav Elchanan with a parable: "There was once a young child who found a rare and very valuable coin at home. He took it and went to the shopkeeper to exchange it for some treats. The shopkeeper, who was an honest man, refused to take the antique coin. 'I cannot take this coin for it is far beyond the value of my entire shop,' he said, 'how could I accept it knowing that you are only giving it to me because you do not appreciate its value?' So too," said the Chofetz Chaim, "Hashem will never agree to such a deal, for He knows the true value of one Mitzvah and knows that the needs of the entire Yeshiva world are not equivalent to even one second of Torah learning."

HAFTORAH

WE'VE ALREADY WON

Alter of Novardok

"Blessed is the man who trusts in Hashem, and whose trust is Hashem." (Yirmiyahu 17:7)

The mere fact that we trust in Hashem is already an enormous blessing, for trust brings us closer to Hashem, and even if we don't receive what we hoped for, we have still attained faith.

THE GREATEST TRUST

Shir Meon

"Blessed is the man who trusts in Hashem, and whose trust is Hashem." (Yirmiyahu 17:7)

If we put our trust in Hashem, even if we find it difficult to do so, Hashem will help us attain perfect faith in Him. We must first do our part by trusting in Hashem; once we have done that, we will be deemed worthy of having Hashem as our "trust."