



The Marcos and Adina Katz YUTORAH IN PRINT

Behar-Bechukotai 5781

In This Hour of Crisis

Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm z"l (Originally delivered May 27, 1967)

This is an hour of crisis, not only for Israel as a State but for Israel as a people. Our destiny, and the destiny of our children and our children's children after us, is being forged by the soldiers of Israel on lonely outposts in the Gaza strip and on the heights overlooking the Gulf of Aqaba. No Jew can afford to look upon the tense situation as an outsider. As Mordecai the Jew said to Queen Esther, highly placed in non-Jewish society and politics, *al tedami be'nafshekh le'himalet beit avikh*--do not imagine that you will find safety whilst danger befalls the rest of the House of Israel.

The Arab guns aimed at the heart of the State are aimed at our hearts. The stranglehold on the Gulf of Aqaba, the lifeline of the medinah, is a stranglehold on our throats. And the Russian contempt for the State of Israel bespeaks the old, traditional Russian contempt for all of us as Jews.

How ought we react in this grave hour? How have Jews always and should Jews now react?

The archetypal and symbolic confrontation between Israel and its enemies was that between Jacob and Esau. When Jacob, surrounded by his wives and children and his retinue, heard that the armed columns of Esau were marching towards him with vengeance in their hearts, the Rabbis tell us that he prepared a threefold strategy: *le'tefillah, le'doron, u-le'milhamah*, he prepared himself for prayer, for gifts, and for war. It is this threefold approach that must become the pattern for our attitude as well.

The *doron*, or gift, that Jacob presented to his brother was a form of legitimate appeasement of a bloodthirsty aggressor, in an attempt to turn his hatred into good will. Indeed, it happened to work with Jacob. But it cannot work for Israel today. First, you cannot placate an enemy who is implacable. Those of us who saw King Faisal on television two days ago heard him declare his avowed intention of exterminating Israel, and President Nasser said the same

thing yesterday. Nothing less than that would satisfy our enemies. Moreover, Israel has nothing left to give. It has given all but the bare skeletal structure necessary for the survival of a modern country.

Hence, our *doron* must be the gift that we American Jews are going to give to the Jews and the government of the State of Israel; in other words, our accelerated participation in that great and historic venture known as the UJA. No Jew who fails to give, and to significantly increase his pledge over the past, has a moral right to be proud that he is a Jew. This year Israel faces unusual economic difficulty; the present fall-off in tourism, together with the stupendous military expenditures that it must undertake, make the situation and the need grave indeed. Those who will therefore give this year far in excess of what they gave in the past, and far in excess of what they are able to give, will be performing an invaluable service. Those who do not do so are, with all their talk, valueless for Israel. Their talk, their worry, their advice, their concern, their pride, their keeping their ears glued to the radio--all this is meaningless!

The Jewish Center Family will have an opportunity on June 7th to demonstrate the extent of its commitment. I should like to see an enthusiastic response like never before. It behooves us to give our *doron* before we are solicited, and to prepare a gift that will tell Israel that we have not faltered, and all the world that Israel does not stand alone.

The second part of that strategy is *milhamah*, war. Can we participate in *milhamah* if it should be necessary?

Yes we can, and yes it is necessary. There are many ways to fight a war, many fronts, and many weapons. Our contribution, though not military, must not be underestimated.

For one thing, we must undertake an indefatigable

political campaign. As members of a subculture in this great democracy, it is entirely proper that we make our opinion felt where such opinions carry weight. We must undertake to inform, by letter and telegram, our President that we support his support of Israel, and to tell him as well as our Senators and Representatives that it was at the urging of an American Secretary of State that Israel gave up much of its previous victory in Sinai, and that the United States has treaty obligations to Israel. This is one campaign in which we can participate immediately after the Sabbath is over.

Another way of making our political influence felt, in a more social manner, will come tomorrow morning when we shall participate physically in demonstrating our support for the State of Israel. We must all take our families and to be present at the "Salute to Israel Parade."

Even more directly, our young people can volunteer to help in Israel. Let them be encouraged. American law forbids military service on behalf of a foreign power. But there is much urgent work to be done, taking the places of Israel's men and women who have been pressed into military service. People are urgently needed, and young people should by all means participate in the "Summer Work in Israel" program which has now been expanded, and in the "Sherut La'am" which offers one or two years of service in Israel. The medical services and all other specialties are urgently needed; but Israel even needs people just to dig trenches and build shelters.

So far, it is good to report that results have been most encouraging. Let no one henceforth speak flippantly of "the vanishing Jews of America!" The volunteer offers have been extremely heartening. I am told that only yesterday a surgeon called from San Francisco to New York to offer his services provided that his two sons would be taken with him. Of particular interest to this congregation is the fact that a brief notice pinned on the bulletin board at Yeshiva University produced, in 36 hours, more than 300 volunteers! I myself have been on the phone with a number of students, including a number of young ladies, from Yavneh, who have asked my intercession with their families to permit them to go forthwith to Israel. There is something ineffably precious about the Jewish soul which allows it to express its idealism so immediately and so openly. Each in his own way, therefore, can participate in this great milhamah.

We are an irenic, peace-loving people. Our hopes and

prayers are for peace and not only for us but for the entire world. The author of "Ore ha-Hayyim" has made this comment in a beautiful interpretation of a verse in today's Sidra. We read *vi'yeshavtem la-vetah be'artzekhem*, "And ye shall dwell securely in your land," followed by *ve'natati shalom ba-aretz*, "And I shall give peace to the land." But, asks the "Ore ha-Hayyim," if we already are told that God will let us dwell securely in our land, surely that includes peace, and why then repeat the promise that God will give peace to the land? In his answer he distinguishes between *artzekhem* and *eret*: the first verse refers to security in *artzekhem*, "your land," which means the Land of Israel. The second verse, however, refers to the granting of peace in *eret*, which should be translated not "the land," but "the world!" In addition to our own national security, we are committed to the great hope and striving for peace throughout the world.

However, when duty and destiny call upon us to work so that others might bear arms on behalf of Israel, or even, if need be, that we do ourselves, we shall not be found hesitating or faltering! If we were a nation like (unto) other nations, this fight would still be noble, but natural. Our existence is at stake, and we shall not submit to the murderous ambitions of that Hitler of the Nile, to those hysterical pygmies of Damascus, or to that venal and obnoxious monarch of the desert kingdom of slave traders.

But Israel is more than that. The creation of the State of Israel was the minimum act by the powers of the world by which they salvaged the barest trace of human dignity left to them. Israel is a state conceived in the ghettos of Europe, born in the death camps of Auschwitz and Treblinka, delivered in the detention camps of Cyprus, and swaddled in the rags by which the Western powers blindfolded themselves to our agony and stuffed their ears not to hear our cry of anguish.

Israel is a penance paid by Russia for Babi Yar, by England for the Struma, by the United States for its refusal to hear the cry of the refugees in time, by the Catholic countries for the silence of the Deputy Pope, by each and every country for its own public and private crimes against the people of the Lord.

When we shall, therefore, act in defense of Israel, we will be fighting not only for Israel's and our existence, but in effect for the honor of Russia and England and America and France and all of mankind, whether they know it or not, realize or not, care or not, appreciate it or not, even

whether they want it or not. For we shall ever remain, as Yehudah Halevi has called us, the heart of the nations and their conscience.

Tani be'shem Rab Elazar, ha-sayaf ve'ha-sefer nitnu mekorakhin min ha-shamayim. The sword and the Book were given wrapped together from Heaven. We have given the world its sefer, its Book. We shall, if need be, now defend that sefer, and the am ha-sefer (People of the Book) with a sayaf (sword) of courage and honor. For that charge and that mission is min ha-shamayim, decreed from Heaven!

Finally, the third element in the Jewish strategy first taught by Jacob is tefillah, prayer. We can perform that by keeping the present situation in mind every time we speak, in our tefillot, of Jerusalem and Zion. In addition, we shall at the conclusion of services today recite special prayers for the welfare of the State of Israel.

But wedded to prayer is the concept of hope. Our prayer and our outlook must always be hopeful, never desperate.

I would like to commend to your attention an insight which speaks not only of hope but offers a perspective that goes far beyond the parochial limits of power politics. Our Sidra, in enumerating the blessings God promises us, says: u-faniti alekhem, "and I shall turn to you," ve'hifreti etkhem ve'hirbeti etkehm ...," and I shall increase you, and make you fruitful, and keep My covenant with you."

On the words u-faniti alekhem, "I shall turn to you," Rashi quotes the Sages: Ipaneh mi-kol asakai le'shalem sekharkhem, "I shall turn away from all My other preoccupations in order to grant you your reward."

What a strange remark! Are we really to take that so anthropomorphically, so primitively? Is God "busy" with other matters so that He has to take "time off" in order to pay loving attention to us?

An answer is provided to us by Rabbi Mordecai Rogov of Chicago, in his work "Ateret Mordecai." He points to the Midrash which states in the name of Rabbi Samuel b. Nachman, that God says: ki anokhi yadati et ha-mahshavot, for I know the thoughts of all men. Applying that to the story of Joseph and his brothers, the Midrash tells us that the brothers were preoccupied with the selling of Joseph, Joseph was busy bemoaning his own bitter fate, Judah was involved in looking for a wife--but ve'ha-Kadosh barukh Hu haya asuk be'oro shel Mashiah, all this while, God was preoccupied with the light of the Messiah! Each of the actors in the great drama thought that he knew the

whole story. The brothers saw this as an act of vengeance, Joseph as a bitter tragedy that had reached its nadir, Judah was altogether distracted by an extraneous matter. None of them really saw the entire episode in its true, ultimate perspective. None of them realized that God was not "busy" moving affairs as he individually saw it, but that the Almighty was simply making preparations for the ultimate development of Jewish history, leading to the final redemption. The Joseph story, even more than others, reveals how human intention and the Divine design can sometimes be utterly different and yet mesh with each other, and how the Divine plan often uses humans who do not even appreciate the role that they play.

Man, by virtue of his natural human limitations, can see only a segment of reality and experience. But if man is wise, he recognizes this, and he understands that beyond his own comprehension there is a God Whose own designs defy our pitiful human attempts at probing His mysteries. We are all actors who play significant roles in a great drama; but few of us ever have any inkling of the extent and direction of the plot.

So it is with the current episode. Today the Arabs are thinking of a quick victory. Russia sees the entire incident as a chance to dislodge the United States from Vietnam. Israel views it as one great crisis that must be overcome. The United States considers it as an added complication forcing it to juggle both Near-Eastern and Far-Eastern commitments. The United Nations regards it as a need to make up for U Thant's blunder, the biggest in the history of diplomacy.

But our hope and our confidence is that God will take "time out" from these individual considerations of the protagonists of the drama and ultimately reveal to us His true preoccupation: ve'ha-Kadosh barukh Hu haya asuk be'oro shel Mashiah, that Almighty God is weaving all these political and military strands into the garment of light that the Messiah will wear, into the intricate designs by which there will come to Israel and all the world the geulah shelemah, the complete redemption.

May, indeed, all our heartache and anxiety, all our worry and preparation for war, be transcended by the yeshuah, by the great victory and salvation which will come, speedily in our day. *Ve'shalom al Yisrael*--and may peace arrive for Israel and all mankind.

Read more at www.yu.edu/about/lamm-heritage.

Taking Stock

Rabbi Joshua (The Hoffer) Hoffman z"l

This week's parsha, Bechukosai, begins with a section containing berachos and kelalos, or blessings and curses. There are two such sections in the Torah, the other one being in parshas Ki Savo. In these sections, the nation is told of rewards it will receive if it complies with God's will and observes His mitzvos, and the punishment it will receive, including exile from its land and the perils which come as a result of that exile, if it does not comply. Unlike the section of berachos and kelalos in parshas Ki Savo, which ends abruptly without assuring the people that God will eventually be reconciled with His people, the section in Bechukosai does end with such an assurance, as we read, "I will remember for them the covenant of the forefathers, those whom I have taken out of the land of Egypt before the eyes of the nations, to be God unto them..." (Vayikra, 26:45).

After the reassuring climax of the section of tochacha, or rebuke, the Torah presents us with a series of laws that are generated by vows people make, beginning with the section of 'arachin,' or evaluations, in which a person donates the 'erech, or evaluated worth of a person, for use in the mishkan. As part of this section, the Torah lists the varying evaluations for males and females at different periods in their lives. Why was this section chosen to be placed immediately after the tochacha? Rabbi Shlomo Ephraim of Lunshitz, in his commentary Keli Yakar, says that this is because people often will make vows in times of distress, just as Ya'akov did when he was fleeing from Eisav. However, unlike Ya'akov, who eventually fulfilled his vow, after his distress passed, members of his nation, are apt to fail in fulfilling their pledges. It is difficult to understand why, according to the Keli Yakar, that this point should be made after the reassuring ending of the tochacha. Rabbi Hillel Lieberman, Hy"d (may God avenge his blood) writes, in his Ahavas HaAretz, that these vows constitute charitable donations, and, as the prophet Yeshayahu tells us (1:27), charity is one of the means through which the exile will come to an end. However, this does not explain why specifically this form of charity is the one that is mentioned in the aftermath of the section of tochacha, as an example of a means of bringing the exile to an end. However, Rabbi Don Yitzchak Abarbanel, in his commentary to Bechukosai, offers an explanation for the nature of the

laws of 'arachin' that can help us understand why they were placed after the tochacha, and give us an insight into the root causes behind the exile and how we can bring it to an end.

Abarbanel writes that the varying valuations given males and females in their respective age groups are uniform for all members of those age groups. Thus, for example, every male between the ages of twenty and fifty is given the value of fifty silver shekels. The reason for this, explains Abarbanel, is to avoid disgracing any person within the nation, and to remove any kind of jealousy among them. Rabbi Aharon Dovid Goldberg, in his commentary Shiras Dovid, cites this explanation of Abarbanel and says that based on it, we can understand an otherwise enigmatic midrash with regard to arachin. The midrash in Vayikra Rabbah (37:2), says that when Moshe, while still living in Pharaoh's palace, went out to his brethren to observe their burdens (Shemos 2:11), he saw the burden of a man placed upon a woman and the burden of a woman placed upon a man, and the burden of an adult placed upon a child and the burden of a youth placed upon an elderly man. Seeing this, he went and rearranged the burdens so that everyone's load was age - and gender - appropriate, whether it was the load of a man, a woman, a young man or an elderly person. God then said that as a reward for doing this, Moshe would, in the future, explain to the people the laws of vows that are appropriate for each age and gender, or, in other words, the laws of arachin. Rabbi Goldberg explains that God was thereby acting in accordance with his principle of 'measure for measure.' Just as Moshe took the trouble to treat each person in a way that was compatible with his age and gender, so too did the laws of vows which he gave through Moshe deal with each person in a manner that preserved his or her human dignity. Based on Rabbi Goldberg's explanation of the midrash in the footprints of the Abarbanel, we can now understand the connection between the laws of arachin and the section of the tochacha.

At the beginning of parshas Bechukosai, God tells the people, "If you will go in My statutes and observe My commandments and perform them, then I will provide your rains in their time..." (Vayikra 26:3-4). Rashi, citing the Toras Kohanim, explains that the phrase 'walk in My

statutes' cannot mean to observe the commandments, because that is mentioned in the subsequent phrase. Rather, it refers to laboring in Torah, meaning, studying torah in an intense way. Rabbi Nissan Alpert zt"l, in his *Limudei Nissan*, explains that when one labors in Torah properly, he delves into it to the point that he understands how the laws of the Torah apply to them on an individual plane, and internalizes that understanding. Following this approach, when the Torah then tells us that a failure to walk in God's statutes eventually leads to destruction and exile, it means that a failure to internalize the teachings of the Torah in a way that conforms to our inner selves is the

root cause that triggers off this tragic process. This being so, the parsha of arachin, as explained by Rabbi Goldberg based on the Abarbanel, can be seen in its proper context. The parsha of 'arachin' teaches us the importance of dealing with people in accordance with the stage of life that they are in. A person who is not attuned to his own inner needs will find it difficult to deal with others in a way appropriate for them, as well. When the root cause of the exile, the lack of laboring in Torah, has been eliminated with the end of the exile, it is once again possible to relate to others in a way that reflects a basic respect for their human dignity, as demanded by the laws of arachin.

Group Reward

Rabbi Assaf Bednarsh (Transcribed and adapted by a talmid from a shiur given in the Gruss Kollel on May 18, 2017)

In the tochecha of Parshas Bechukosai, Hashem spells out very clearly the rewards of kiyum ha-mitzvos and, lo aleinu, the punishment for aveiros. The philosophers throughout the ages have been puzzled why the Torah does not openly discuss the more significant and sublime consequences. In other words, ultimately, this world is just a blink of an eye. But if one is mekayem mitzvos, one is zoche for Chayei ha-Olam ha-Bo—the eternal bliss of being nehene from ziv ha-Shechina. And if someone has an opposite lifestyle, they get the opposite after their one hundred & twenty (about which we will not go into detail). But instead, the Torah seems to talk about kleinerkeit, about relatively small, unimportant things: How much rain you will get; how well your flocks will fare; war and peace; famine and plenty. That is not the ikar, however. Open Mesilas Yesharim or pretty much any other Mussar sefer, and you see that the ikar is to set sights on the spiritual life of eternity in Olam ha-Bo. So why does the Torah only talk about gashmius when discussing reward and punishment?

There are many answers given to this. But one fascinating answer is given by Rav Yosef Albo in his *Sefer Ha-Ikarim*. He writes that we have to understand the nature of the document that is the Torah. The Torah is obviously some kind of a bris—a covenant between two parties. Who are the two parties? The modern man might contend—Hashem and I. But that is not pshat in the Torah. When you read the Torah, it does not say that. It says that the covenant is between Hashem and Bnei Yisroel. *Sefer Ikarim* explains that all those things that

happen after misa, in the next world—Gehinom, Gan Eiden, and Olam ha-Bo are very individualistic. Everyone has their own individual cheshbon, and Hashem evaluates them individually. Each one receives their due after their one hundred & twenty. These are most significant, philosophically, he says. But that has no place in the Torah because the Torah is not a book about relationships, or covenants, or dealings, between Hashem and the individual. We might know that through philosophical, religious, and theological speculation. Maybe you can figure it out logically. But the Torah is about a relationship between Hashem and Am Yisroel. If we are good, as Am Yisroel, we are treated in a certain way. And unfortunately, if we are not good, we are treated differently. In this world, all kinds of things happen to communities or nations. Some receive plentiful rains, while others suffer devastating droughts. Some dwell in peace, while others are embroiled in warfare. They enjoy economic success or endure financial failure. However, in Olam ha-Bo, there are no communities or nations. And therefore, the discussion in the Torah involves rewards and punishments that apply to a klal—Klal Yisroel, since they can only have physical things happen to them as a klal.

Besides being one of many keen answers to this perplexing philosophical problem—the more profound message here is the perspective on Torah. There is a general philosophical yesod: that Hashem created us, human beings, in this world, that we are owed Hashem, and that ultimately, we set our sights on Olam ha-Bo. But the Torah

is not coming to be mechadesh that—perhaps, we could have figured that out using logic. The Torah is mechadesh the relationship between Hashem and Am Yisroel. Being mekayem the Torah means to strengthen the relationship between Hashem and the nation. This ties into many other things. For example—whenever Moshe refers to Matan Torah in his farewell address, he never refers to it as the day of Matan Torah. He never calls it a day of giluy Shechinah; he always calls it be-Yom ha-Kahal—the day when we were a Kahal. And we know the Midrash: vayichan sham Yisroel neged ha-har—ke-ish echad be-lev echad. Somehow the giving of the Torah can happen only to a Kahal—who are ke-ish echad, be-lev echad. We could be religious as individuals. And not only we could be—we must be! But the Torah is only meant for a Kahal. That is why every seven years we have Shmita. And as meforshim point out, Shmita is a great equalizer. It brings people together by having them share their wealth, forgive the debts, etc.—and therefore, the higher social classes cannot lord over the lower ones. And at the end of Shmita, we are zoche to recreate Matan Torah via the mitzva of Hak’hel—which is akin to Yom ha-Kahal. Only when we had a year to come together as one nation can we be zoche

to recreate Ma’amad Har Sinai by having a Jewish king stand-in for the King of Kings and read us the Torah. This commemoration thereby reminding us that we accept the Torah anew—as a Kahal. Therefore, when we think about our purpose in life, where we are going, and what we are doing, on the one hand, we realize that we are individuals and every individual has a relationship with Hashem (and that was true even before giving of the Torah). Everyone knows that a human being is created by Hashem and should worship Him. And we need to focus our individual growth on avodas Hashem. But, on the other hand, we also need to realize that when Hashem gave us the Torah, he was mechadesh something entirely new—that the Torah is about Hashem and Am Yisroel. And therefore, if we want to talk about kiyum ha-Torah—yakim es divrei ha-Torah ha-zos—as the Medrash points out, our goal in life should be to convince and help other Jews to keep the Torah. We need to ensure that we bring the whole of Am Yisroel with us. And we should focus on the ruchnius of Am Yisroel, in addition to our own. And, be’ezras Hashem, we will succeed in bringing everyone along with us to worship Hashem as one Am. And that is the real prelude to Kabolas ha-Torah, and that is what kiyum ha-Torah is all about.

Making a Sacred Space

Rabbi Noach Goldstein

“אַתְּ שִׁבְתָּתִי תִשְׁמְרוּ וּמִקְדָּשִׁי תִירָאוּ אֲנִי ה'”

“You shall keep My Sabbaths and venerate My sanctuary; I am Hashem”

This is the closing verse of Parshat Behar, and R. Samson Rafael Hirsch points out that it actually summarizes all of Sefer Vayikra. The first half of Vayikra focuses on קְדוּשַׁת הַמָּקוֹם – the sanctity of the place of the Mishkan. Hence the details of the korbanot and the laws of purity, who may enter the Mishkan, who must leave, and how may they return. The second half focuses on קְדוּשַׁת הַזְּמַן – the sanctity of time. Shabbat, the festivals, shemita, and yovel. The Torah thus boils down the endless details of Vayikra into five words. Vayikra’s mission: instill קְדוּשָׁה in our lives. The technique: אַתְּ שִׁבְתָּתִי תִשְׁמְרוּ; וּמִקְדָּשִׁי תִירָאוּ; the rest is commentary.

Mefarshim unpack the relationship between these two concepts, and the Seforno makes a particularly relevant insight. At first glance there seems to be a contrast: there are so many שְׁבֻתוֹת—shabbat every week, chagim every

few months, shemita every few years—and only one Mikdash. However the Seforno argues that the phrase “מִקְדָּשִׁי תִירָאוּ” does not only command us to venerate the Beit HaMikdash, but to venerate every shul and beit midrash that is set aside for davening and Torah study. This idea already stems from the Gemara (Yevamot 6b), which states that just as the commandment to observe שְׁבֻתוֹת applies in all times, even when the Mikdash is destroyed, so does the commandment to venerate any place that is sanctified for Hashem.

This idea is particularly resonant as we emerge from the era of lockdowns baruch Hashem and shuls are able to begin opening up more and more. Shabbat has always been a time where we flock to shul, and קְדוּשַׁת הַזְּמַן and קְדוּשַׁת הַמָּקוֹם can intersect. Let’s reinforce this idea now, as children, friends and families begin returning to shul. The שְׁבֻתוֹת are times that we carve out to transcend hectic schedules for higher purposes, and our perceptions of shul should match that. The chance to gather with our friends

again is wonderful, but at the same time let's emphasize that we are gifted the opportunity to return to a place of

קדושה, a place to venerate, a place to connect to the Ribono Shel Olam.

A Welcome Tension

Rabbi Dr. Dvir Ginsberg

When asked what is celebrated on Shavuot, the common answer is the giving of the Torah. The very phraseology of "giving of the Torah" is a reminder of the event at Mount Sinai and all the requisite miraculous events that took place there. However, when the question of what specifically was taught at Sinai, the answer becomes a bit harder to elucidate. Much ink is spilled regarding the historical question of what the Jewish people learned at Mount Sinai. A seemingly innocuous reference to Mount Sinai at the beginning of the Torah portion of Behar helps reframe the issue of what occurred to grasping the identity of Torah itself.

The first verse of Behar is quite terse (Vayikra 25:1):

"And the Lord spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai, saying,"

The next verses begin to lay out the details of shemitta, the laws relating to abstaining from farming (and other agricultural activities) on the land of Israel every seventh year.

Rashi raises an obvious question:

"What [special relevance] does the subject of shemittah have with Mount Sinai? Were not all the commandments stated from Sinai? However, [this teaches us that] just as with shemittah, its general principles and its finer details were all stated from Sinai, likewise, all of them were stated-their general principles [together with] their finer details-from Sinai."

Rabbi Baruch Epstein, in his Torah Temimah, notes that Rashi (who is quoting a Midrash) is siding with one opinion of an important debate. We find the issue discussed in the Talmud (Zevachim 115b):

"For it was taught, R. Ishmael said: The general laws (kelalim) were stated at Sinai, while the details (pratim) were stated at the Tent of Meeting. R. Akiba said: The general laws and the details were stated at Sinai, repeated in the Tent of Meeting, and a third time in the plains of Moab."

When analyzing the above debate, the position of Rabbi Yishmael stands out as being awkward. Why not teach the entire corpus of Torah at Sinai? What is there to gain by splitting up the legal system, teaching kelalim at Sinai while saving the pratim for a different location? In fact, one could argue that separating the two could lead to a challenge concerning the chain of tradition.

While Rabbi Akiva's overall approach appears to be more sensible, the fact that he requires repetition would seem to be a bit of overkill. Why is he insistent on reiterating the entire Torah?

This type of debate may reflect a fundamental tension that emerged with the giving of the Torah to the Jewish people. There are two characteristics of Torah that push and pull against each other, fighting for dominance. At the same time, both are necessary to create the entity we call Torah.

On the one hand, the perseverance of Torah is grounded in the idea of tradition, or mesora. The Torah being handed to the Jewish people at Sinai, in its entirety, guaranteed that no challenge could come forth against the authenticity of Torah. For example, one could never argue that the general idea of Shabbat was given at Sinai, but the specific laws were fabricated later. Rabbi Akiva emphasizes the importance of a clear and unbroken chain, pointing to the Torah being taught multiple times prior to entering the land of Israel. The information of Torah, once given at Sinai, was now consecrated as a permanent and unchangeable system.

Along with tradition comes the importance of teaching and learning Torah. Hashem was going to teach the Jewish people the system of halacha, a system that transcends legalities. Torah is a way of life, allowing humanity to ascend and live at the highest possible level. In learning Torah, it is critical to first understand the underlying concepts before engaging with the details. One can, for example, discuss the exact measure of a defect in an etrog to render it unusable during the holiday of Sukkot. Yet, without a comprehension of the purpose and construct of Sukkot itself, the discussion of specifics has no meaning or address. The foundations must be in place first, and only then can the particulars be understood in their appropriate light. Rabbi Yishmael is accentuating the importance of how the Torah was taught, rather than how it was transmitted, and is seeking out the ideal way of educating the Jewish people.

The above tension now becomes clearer. We honor our

mesora, treating it as an object of incalculable value. Our mesora has been crucial in sustaining Judaism, and without our mesora, there is no system of halacha. The rigidity demanded by tradition is the bedrock of the sustainability of Judaism. At the same time, learning Torah is so much more than a review of that which is known. Learning Torah involves creativity, uncovering new ideas, allowing for an evolution of halacha. The Torah's success is as much rooted in the new as it is in maintaining the old. While the mesora must remain static, learning brings with it a unique dynamism. One can sense the tug when immersed in learning, almost a welcoming of the tension.

Lessons From Shemittah

Mrs. Michal Horowitz

In this first of this week's double parshios, Parshas Behar, the Torah commands us regarding Shemittah - the seventh Sabbatical year - and Yovel - the fiftieth Jubilee year. These mitzvos fall under the special category of mitzvos ha'te'luyos ba'Aretz - mitzvos that are in effect in the land of Israel, and not outside of it. As the land of Israel is a Holy Land, under unique and special Divine Providence, more than all the other lands (Ramban to Vayikra 18:24-25), its special status is further elevated through these land-dependent mitzvos.

And Hashem spoke to Moshe on Har Sinai, saying: **דַּבֵּר אֶל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם, כִּי תָבֹאוּ אֶל-הָאָרֶץ, אֲשֶׁר אָנִי נֹתֵן לָכֶם אֶל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְשָׁבַתָה הָאָרֶץ, שְׁבַת לַה' - *Speak to the Children of Israel and you shall say to them: When you come to the land that I am giving you, the land shall rest a Sabbath to Hashem; for six years you may sow your field, and for six years you may prune your vineyard, and gather in its produce; and in the seventh year the land shall have a complete rest, a rest to Hashem, you shall not sow your field, nor shall you prune your vineyard* (Vayikra 25:1-4).**

For six years the farmer diligently tends to his soil, seeding, planting, weeding, harvesting and reaping the benefits of his labor. Working the land, the landowner is viscerally aware that the output of his fields - and his sustenance - depends, on a large part, on the efforts that he invests in his land. And while he reaps the harvest of his work, his labor further enhances the beauty and output of the Land.

הַשְּׂמִימִים שְׂמִימִים לָהּ, וְהָאָרֶץ

And this tension is always on display. Debates rage across the spectrum about this very issue. How far can creativity take us before we abandon the demands of mesora? How beholden to mesora must we be when faced with challenging modern situations? While there is no clear answer, the very idea of being immersed in this back and forth reflects the very debate cited in the Talmud. In many ways, Shavuot is not just the celebration of the historical event of the giving of the Torah. It is also the celebration of the system of Torah, tradition and learning working hand in hand.

וְנָתַן לְבָנֵי אָדָם, *The heavens are the heavens of Hashem, and the land He gave to the sons of man* (Tehilim 115:16). It is our national responsibility and privilege to work the land, and to enjoy the fruits of that labor.

“When the settlement of Magdi'el celebrated its establishment, HaRav Avraham Yitzchak ha'Kohen Kook (1865-1935) zt'l participated in the festivities. The ceremony included the planting of trees, and R' Kook was given the honor of placing the first sapling in the ground. The organizers handed R' Kook a hoe with which to dig the hole, but he threw it aside and began digging with his bare hands...

“Suddenly, R' Kook's entire body seemed to quiver and shake, and his face looked like a burning flame, as he placed the sapling in the ground with awe and trepidation.

“‘What is all this excitement about?’ he was asked. ‘Thank G-d people plant hundreds of trees every day in Eretz Yisrael!’ R' Kook replied, ‘When I held that tender sapling in my hand, I remembered the imperative to emulate G-d and walk in His ways... At the beginning of Creation, the Holy One Blessed be he engaged in planting, as it says: **וַיִּטַע ה' אֱלֹקִים, גֶּן בְּעֵדֶן**, *and Hashem Elokim planted a garden in Eden* (Bereishis 2:8). Similarly, teach the Sages, when you enter the Land, engage in planting, as it is written: **וְכִי תָבֹאוּ אֶל הָאָרֶץ, וְנִטְעַתֶּם כָּל עֵץ מִמְּאֹכַל**, *and when you come to the Land, you shall plant all types of food trees* (Vayikra 19:32) [Vayikra Rabba 25]. When I was about to put the sapling in the ground,’ Rav Kook explained, ‘I remembered these words and felt as if I was clinging to the Shechinah. Thus, I was overcome by emotion, fear and

trembling” (An Angel Among Men, p.273-274).

And while working the land is holy work, and an emulation of G-d’s ways, allowing the land to rest in the seventh (and fiftieth) year is also a Divine command and emulation of His ways. As He rested on the seventh - וַיִּשְׁבֹּת - *and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had made* (Bereishis 2:2) - we too must cease working the land in the seventh year and allow it to rest.

The years where the land lies fallow reminds us that though He gave the earth to the sons of men, ultimately, there is only One Owner of all lands: לַה' הָאֲרֶץ וּמְלוֹאָתָהּ תִּבְלֶה, וַיִּשְׁבֹּת בָּהּ, *to Hashem is the earth and its fullness, the world and those who dwell in it* (Tehilim 24:1).

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik zt'l teaches, “The idea behind Shemittah and Yovel is that man does not truly own anything. The use of the term Shabbos for both the seventh day and the seventh year is not coincidental. What is the common motif? To keep Shabbos is to bear witness that G-d is the Creator. Man professes faith that He is the Creator, not in the homiletical sense but in halachic terms. A Shabbos violator is considered a mumar lechol ha'Torah, one who has violated the entire Torah, because he denies

the authority of G-d over creation. The same motif applies to Shemittah. It is a restoration of the authority of G-d and the proclamation of G-d as the Creator and the Maker.

“The prohibitions of the thirty-nine forbidden categories of work (melachos) involve an extension of one’s authority through productive work. Shabbos violation includes only meleches machsheves, intentional actions that result in constructive work. Mekalkel, destructive acts, are permitted, because they do not demonstrate authority.

“Shemittah is referred to as Shabbos because, like Shabbos, it is a time of surrender. Shabbos, Shemittah, and Yovel all involve the surrender of authority to the true Owner” (Chumash Masores haRav, Vayikra, p.205-207).

Through working the land, and then allowing the land to lie fallow, we emulate G-d in all of our ways. We acknowledge His dominion and accept His rulership. We bow our heads in submission to His will and gratefully give thanks for the bounty He blesses us with.

The heavens are G-d’s and the earth He gave to man (Ps.115:16) - “He gave the earth to man so that man should make it heavenly” (Chidushei HaRim, 1799-1866) (Quoted in Great Jewish Wisdom, p.27).

Developing Emunah and Preparing for the Future

Rabbi Dr. David Shabtai

In commanding us that every seven years we are to take a break from farming and give the Land a formal rest, the Torah already anticipates some of the obvious objections people may have.

וכי תאמרו מה נאכל בשנה השביעית, הן לא נזרע ולא נאסוף את - *And if you should ask “what shall we eat in that seventh year,” since after all, we are not allowed to plant or harvest anything.*

וצויתי את ברכתי לכם בשנה השישית ועשת את התבואה לשש - *And I [Hashem] will command My blessing to the sixth year, such that it will produce enough food for three years [the sixth year, the seventh, and the beginning of the eighth - since nothing will be planted in the seventh].*

But even while it’s an obviously anticipated question and answer, it’s somewhat strange for the Torah to be so verbose about it. The Torah could have simply said that Hashem will bless the sixth year, without having to explicitly state “And if you should ask ...”

The Noam Elimelekh explains that ‘normally’ Hashem

sends his blessings of wealth and prosperity from the upper-spiritual worlds to our physical world through certain channels. If a person demonstrates a lack of faith in Hashem, the person causes a blockage or break in those channels and Hashem needs to create new ones to enable the berakhah to flow once again. He explains that that is what is happening in these pesukim.

When a person wonders how Hashem could command taking a year off from any agricultural work since it will clearly harm his ability to provide for himself and his family, this person is challenging Hashem’s ability and displaying a lack of faith. “And if / when you shall ask ...” then those channels will be broken and Hashem will need to “command My blessings” by creating new ones.

It’s no coincidence that the Torah chooses to teach this lesson about אמונה (Emunah, faith) with regard to farming. In searching for various Biblical allusions to the sections of Mishnah, the Gemara (Shabbat 31a) associates אמונה with סדר זרעים — the first of the six sections of Mishnah that

generally deals with agricultural mitzvot. The Yerushalmi explains that a farmer puts his faith into Hashem and plants seeds into the ground.

There are certainly other professions in which people display great Emunah and there are certainly many farmers who lack this requisite faith. What is it about farming specifically that the Torah chooses to highlight?

Farming indeed requires a lot of work; it doesn't happen on its own. From preparing the ground, to planting, watering, maintaining, weeding, and eventually harvesting — there is a lot of human labor that makes it happen. But for at least a short while, the real 'magic' happens where nobody can see it. While we all know that the seeds planted in the ground germinate, sprout, and eventually develop into a stalk of grain, it's not a process that humans are privy to. We know it's taking place, we just can't watch it happen.

Perhaps this is why the Torah chooses farming as symbolic of faith. Emunah means that we know that Hashem runs the world, that whatever He does is good, and that He will take care of whatever is necessary — it's just that we can't always see it. Emunah means that we

know it's happening, we just can't watch it happening. It not only symbolizes Emunah, but it's also a way for a farmer to further develop his Emunah and through which he can tap into the Heavenly channels of berakhah.

Shevilei Pinhas explains that when faced with Shemittah when no farming is allowed, a farmer might wonder how he will manage without access to that berakhah. Without the merit of his Emunah through farming, a farmer may become despondent. To that the Torah responds that in that sixth year, in preparation for Shemittah, he can more strongly work on his Emunah, building himself up more and more, so that when Shemittah comes, he has attained enough merit to get him through the next year and more.

Both literally and figuratively, this is where we currently find ourselves. Next year is Shemittah. We are in that very sixth year. And it's been a difficult sixth year. From the pandemic to last week's tragedy in Meiron, our Emunah may have been challenged. But this is specifically the time to work on our faith to see Hashem wherever we can. Because the Torah promises that if we do so — specifically in this sixth year — that that merit can be far greater than we can imagine.

Consistency in Parenting

Rabbi Yosef Goldin

The תוכחה, a section in Parshat Bechukotai outlining punishments destined to befall the Jewish people if they don't keep the Torah, is one of the most frightening sections in the Torah. It describes horrific scenarios of fear and destruction- scenarios that have unfortunately come to fruition over our national history. In outlining the reason for these punishments, the Torah repeats one word over and over- the word קרי. The Torah describes the tragedies to be a punishment for the fact that the Jewish people “walk with Me (Hashem) בקרי”.

It seems clear that this word is the key to understanding the impetus for the horrible punishments of the תוכחה - but what exactly does it mean?

Rashi explains that the word קרי comes from the word מקרה, “chance” or “happenstance”- and describes people whose relationship with Hashem is one of happenstance and randomness. There is no consistency in the relationship, no constancy. These people serve G-d and do mitzvot only when it suits them; and when not in the

mood, they simply don't relate to Him. Such a relationship, explains the Torah, is fundamentally flawed. And when we relate to HaShem in this way, Hashem responds in kind- relating to Am Yisrael in a random and unpredictable way, resulting in horrific destruction and devastation for Am Yisrael.

At first glance, this seems a bit harsh. After all, at least in this situation a relationship with Hashem does exist on some level. Why does a lack of consistency in the relationship warrant such a powerfully destructive response from Hashem?

If we consider the nature of all relationships, however, it becomes clear that the most important characteristic of a successful relationship is commitment and consistency. If a marriage or friendship contains a deep commitment from both parties and is built upon mutual trust- if each side can depend on the other to “be there” for them- then the relationship is strong and will stand the test of time. But if the relationship lacks commitment and consistency-

if each side is “present” in the relationship only when it’s convenient and helpful to him- then the relationship is fundamentally flawed. In this case, each participant is simply “using” the other to get what he wants- neither is fully committed to the other. This type of relationship will wither over time, as it lacks the crucial ingredients needed to sustain it.

Hashem therefore proclaims to the Am Yisrael: The key ingredient to a successful relationship between us is consistency. If we commit fully to each other- if you will serve Me in a committed and constant fashion, then I will commit to care for you in kind. But if your service to Me is בקרי , happenstance, and dependent on your mood or convenience, then I will act towards you in the same way. Sometimes I will take care of your needs, other times I simply will not. Lacking My continued protection, you will be subject to destruction and devastation.

If consistency is a foundational building block in any relationship, it’s certainly a crucial aspect of parenting as well- in a couple of ways that I would like to highlight:

1) It goes without saying that our children need to feel the consistency of our support and love. Our kids need to know implicitly that we are “there” for them under all circumstances and that they can “count” on us no matter what- regardless of any behaviors they may exhibit. It’s this fundamental and steadfast love that, during childhood, forms the foundation for their emotional health for years to come.

2) As we have mentioned, we parents have the most direct impact upon the religious growth and development of our children. Our kids see the “real” us in the comfort

of our home, and they learn from how we act. If we want our children to develop consistency in their Avodat Hashem and connection to G-d, then they must see that consistency within our own actions first. We must put in the effort and dedication to living a life committed to Torah and mitzvot- and then our children will hopefully learn by example.

3) Finally, consistency is particularly important in the realm of discipline. One of the main responsibilities of parents is to set the boundaries for appropriate behavior from our kids. In this area, many experts stress the importance of being clear and consistent in our expectations. We must clearly outline how we expect them to act- and respond in a consistent fashion to their actions. We must keep our word, and we must enforce our rules regularly. If our children sense any inconsistency in how we respond to them or enforce our expectations, then their respect for our authority will diminish, making it harder for us to discipline them, moving forward. If we clearly and firmly enforce our expectations in a reliable way, then our children will be more likely to understand our boundaries and respect them.

In this week’s parsha, we learn about the danger of a relationship that lacks consistency- what happens when we act towards Hashem בקרי , by happenstance. Such reliability is the foundation of all relationships- but it is particularly important in many areas of parenting. The more we are able to maintain consistency in how we act and parent, the better we will be able to educate our children.

The Spirit of Shemithah

Rabbi Chaim Metzger

Mah inyan Shemithah etzel Har Sinai?” “What are the laws of Shemithah, the Sabbatical Year, doing at Mount Sinai?”

When hearing this phrase in Canada or elsewhere outside of Israel, one expects the speaker to be referencing Rashi’s question in his commentary to Vayikra 25:1, where the Torah specifies that Hashem taught the laws of Shemithah to Moshe at Sinai. Rashi answers that, “The laws of Shemithah and all its details were given at Har Sinai, as were the rest of the mitzvot in the Torah.”

When I first heard the phrase spoken in Israel, shortly before my Bar Mitzvah, I was super-excited because I knew Rashi’s answer. Much to my disappointment, my aunt said it was the Hebrew equivalent of, “What does that have to do with the price of tea in China?” to stop me from sidetracking a conversation.

The question, though, remains: why do we keep Shemithah, and how does it relate to Har Sinai? Commentators offer eight answers for the former question:

- Rambam (Moreh haNevuchim 3:39) offers two

reasons: To be generous and gracious to all by sharing food; and so that the land will be able to rest before producing more afterward.

- Sefer haChinuch (Mitzvah 84) suggests four more reasons: To teach us the value of sharing; to teach us that the land really belongs to G-d; to increase our faith in G-d; and to strengthen our belief that G-d created the world in six days and rested on Shabbat.
- Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak haKohen Kook, in the introduction to his halachic work on Shemithah, Shabbat haAretz, explains that Shemithah works like Shabbat, but on a larger scale – as a way for the whole nation to pause and discover their inner Divine radiance in all its glory.
- Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Kalischer expounds on Rabbi Avraham Ibn Ezra's suggestion (Devarim 31:10-12) that Shemithah allows us to throw off the yoke of the daily grind and devote ourselves to Torah study.

But how do these eight excellent reasons for Shemithah connect to Har Sinai?

Rabbi Menachem Leibtag suggests that the true goal of Shemithah is to create a year-long simulation of the Jewish People's experiences at Har Sinai and in the wilderness. There are many distinct aspects of that nation-forming journey that must be replicated to create a cohesive spiritual and national identity for the Jewish People. Only across an entire year of learning and experiential education, without being tied down by the agricultural and financial

responsibilities that burden the mind and soul, can the aforementioned ideas be brought to fruition.

It should come as no surprise, then, that the crowning event of Shemithah is Hakhel. As described in Devarim 31:9-14, the words of the Torah are read to all – men, women and children. We are recreating ma'amad Har Sinai, the Revelation at Sinai, and everyone's participation, whether they be young or old, male or female, is needed to make that a reality.

Along the same lines, when Moshe retells the experience of Har Sinai in Devarim 4:9-14, his focus is not only on G-d revealing Himself to the nation, but also on the Aseret haDibrot and the laws of the Torah that were given. We are exhorted to remain faithful and to pass on what we have lived through to our children and grandchildren. Only when we finally make it into the Land of Israel does this message truly become clear.

Once we left the protective womb that was the experience in the desert, where G-d provided for our every need, were we exposed to the real world, which carries the danger of forgetting that G-d is the source of our success. The juxtaposition of Shemithah and Har Sinai defines both as moments when the Jewish People feel closest to G-d, inoculating them from the cold and harsh reality that can affect that relationship. By taking a break from our hectic lives to regain focus on what truly matters during the Shemithah year, we can relive the Har Sinai experience and continue growing as a nation united to serve G-d.