

PORTION	DATE	HEB DATE	TORAH	NEVIIM	KETUVIM
Bechukotai	1 June, 2019	27 Iyyar 5779	Lev. 26:3-27:34	Jer. 16:19-17:14	Matt 16:20-28

This week’s Torah portion *Bechukotai* is the last portion for the Book of Leviticus. It contains 13 blessings (vs. 3-13) for obedience and 30 curses (vs. 14-39) for disobedience. In other words, if you do good, then you will be rewarded. If you do bad, then you will be punished. While the Torah lists the results of obedience and disobedience, it does not mention the World Above or rewards to come whereas the other religions constantly mention of “going to heaven.” The Torah, however, completely ignores of “going to heaven.” Instead, it is more focused on the rewards and punishments in this physical world.

First, let’s start with the blessings and the curses. As mentioned, there are 13 blessings and 30 curses. It hardly seems fair that there are more curses than blessing. So, let’s examine this first. Our *parasha* starts with *aleph* (א) in verse 3 (אם-בְּחֻקַּי, *im-be-chuk-ko-tai*) and ends with *tav* (ת) in verse 13 (קוֹמֵי יוֹת, *ko-me-mi-yut*) for blessings and the curses starts with *vav* (ו) in verse 14 (וְאִם-לֹא, *ve'im-lo*) and ends with *hei* (ה) in verse 46 (בְּיַד-מִשְׁפָּה, *be-yad-mo-sheh*) in Hebrew. The sages taught that the blessings range from *aleph* to *tav* with a whole range of blessing. The curse, however, has no space between *vav* and *hei*, meaning the curse has no range at all.

The blessings and the curses are given in sequence. But there is a big difference. The blessings were given in a full measure whereas the curses are given in increment. The blessing is given to the land, peace, chase away enemies, children, and Hashem dwelling amongst Yisraelites.

The curses were given in sickness, not enough crops, attack of the beasts, war, chased away from the land. We can see many signs already how Hashem is displeased with the people. There are many people who are sick and with unknown diseases, people in hunger, animals attacking people, constant war, and people fleeing from their country.

The Zohar teaches that in order not to earn “bread of shame,” or unearned reward, Hashem gave us free-choice where we have to make an effort to choose good over evil. We have previously discussed between a choice and a free-choice. A choice is to make a selection between what you like or dislike. For example, a dog makes a choice to eat what it prefers between dry and wet food. A free-choice is to overcome the desire of dislike and eat what its master give him. The animals, while it can make choices, it cannot overcome its desires. For example, a person you dislike fell into a quicksand and you happen to dislike him. The first response is not to save him. (choice) But you overcome your natural desire to let him die and you throw a rope to save him. (free-choice)

For the past week, we talked about the *sefirah* of *yesod* which means connection. We are in one way or another connected to each other. It is the job of *sitra achra* (the side of impurity) to create division between families and friends, even amongst strangers. It does not matter whether you sin or not as long as there is a division. Its only care is separation by creating arguments. For example: There are some people that I saw in YouTube that the world is flat despite all the scientific data which says otherwise. Some say that the landing of the moon never happened. That it was all created with illusions by the Hollywood film-makers. Some conspiracy theorists say that the world is controlled by an Illuminati or a Free Mason. These are the things that divide the people and *sitra achra* is doing an excellent job as it succeeded in many facets of life.

The deception is so strong even Hashem said, “The sin of Yehudah is written with a pen of iron, engraved with the point of a diamond on the tablet of their heart.” (Jer. 17:1) Even Yeshua said to Kepha, “Get behind Me, Satan!” (Matt. 16:23)

There is a term we need to understand. *Kelipat Nogah* that can be illuminated and *Shalosh Kelipot Hatmayot* (Three totally impure *Kelipot*). *Nogah* can be uplifted and refined whereas the only form of reformation or redemption for the three impure *kelipot* is for their destruction. In the book of Ezekiel, the unclean *kelipot* is referred as “whirlwind,” “great cloud,” and a “blazing fire”. *Nogah* is described as the “translucence”. The three impure *kelipot* are the souls of all living creatures that are not kosher including *Orlah*; thoughts, utterance, and actions to the 365 negative commandments; and everything that profanes the *Kadosh*.

Kabbalah divides everything in this world into either *Sitra D’Kedushah* (the side of holiness) or *Sitra Achra* (the side of impurity)—literally meaning “the other side,” or the side of *Kelipah*. There is nothing that is in between—every thought, speech, action, or creation has its source either in *Kedushah* or *Kelipah*. Kabbalah uses the term *Kelipah* to describe evil. Literally, *Kelipah* means a “peel” or “shell,” as in the peel of a fruit.

The Midrash states that prior to the creation of this world, Hashem created other worlds and destroyed them. The Arizal explains that these were not physical worlds but were spiritual realms. The first world, as stated in Genesis 1:2 that the world was *tohu vavohu* (תהו ובהו) (chaotic and empty). And the sefirot existed individually with no inter-relationship. For example, *chesed* was pure *chesed* without any relations to *gevurah*. When the Light entered, these sefirot were egotistic and wanted all the Light for itself, and it could not contain the Light. Thus, all the *sefirot* burst itself which resulted in a “Shattering of the Vessels.” This type of the world could not exist and it was destroyed for a better world of correction (*tikkun*) where each *sefirah* is inter-related and interconnected. The Shattering of the Vessels was not an accidental flaw but a divine plan. This process allowed for the creation of evil that man can exercise free-choice.

Isaac Luria teaches that there are 288 fallen sparks which derived from Genesis 1:2, “The spirit of Elohim hovered over the face of the waters. In Hebrew, מְרַחֵף עַל-פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם, וְרוּחַ אֱלֹהִים, *ve-ru-ach e-lo-him, me-ra-che-fet al-pe-nei ham-ma-yim*). The word, ‘*me-ra-che-fet*’ is a compound of two words: “*met*” and “*rachaph*”. The first and last letters are מ and ה which means ‘death.’ The remaining letters, רחפ which means ‘move’ has a numerical value of 288 (*resh* 200 + *chet* 8 + *pey* 80). Meaning that 288 fragments (“*rachaph*”) had died (“*met*”). It is an allusion to the shattering of the vessels of *tohu* (chaotic) into 288 initial sparks.

Now, returning to the very first of this week’s portion in Vayikra 26:3, it says, “If you walk in My laws and guard My commands, and shall do them.” “Laws” are commonly translated as “decrees.” The sages question: What does it mean by “laws”? They answer that it cannot be reference to keeping the commandments, since the verse states ‘If you walk in My laws and guard My commands...’ This indicates that the laws and the commandments are two separate entities. It is a Divine call for Yisrael to be immersed in, and occupied with the study of Torah. A proper understanding of the goal of creation can given man a clear direction and understanding of his purpose on earth to properly understand Hashem’s will and desire for man. All misunderstanding or misperception stems from a lack of this understanding.

From Vayikra 26:14 begins “curses”. Rather, it can be said as “admonishments” or “consequences” for not heeding to Hashem. But He is not vindictive. These curses are the consequence of our own choices we make in life. It is not Hashem’s doing and it cannot be blamed on Him. The Book of Vayikra is Hashem’s perception of reality and it is the lifeline for us to hold on. We are to live our lives in acknowledgment of

the Creator. He gives us hope that if we walk His way He “shall remember [His] covenant with Ya’akov, and also [His] Covenant with Yitzchak, and also remember [His] covenant with Abraham.

May all of us walk His ways.
Baruch Hashem.

Shalom.