May 11th, 2023 Volume 13 Issue 26



פרשת בהר–בחקתי
Parshat Behar-Bechukotai

Ashreinu | אשרינו

Enhancing your Study of the Weekly Torah Portion

Rabbi Avi Engelhart

Owen Sausen ('24)

Sophia Pearl ('24)

Akiva Lanner ('26)

Lauren Schebovitz ('26)

Self-Worth

Rabbi Avi Engelhart

Earlier this year on Yom Kippur, the shul that I was davening at began their appeals by raising money for the weekly kiddush fund. Perhaps as a joke, the gabbai began stating how much barley they need each Shabbat and expressed the financial strain it puts on the shul to feed everyone after davening. One congregant excitedly proclaimed, "I'll donate 50 bags of barley!" The gabbai's partner, who was sitting and placing paper clips on donation cards, didn't quite know what to do. The gabbai quickly assessed and expressed: "Ok, so let's say a bag of barley is $5, so that's a donation of $250". Another congregant proclaimed, "I'll donate 100 bags of barley!". To their dismay, the rest of the donations that Yom Kippur were expressed as bags of barley.

In the middle of Parshat Bechukotai, Hashem tells Moshe the following:

דַּבֵּר אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם אִישׁ כִּי יַפְלִא נֶדֶר בְּעֶרְכְּךָ נְפָשֹׁת לַה׳

"Speak to the people of Israel and instruct them on the matter of vowing the worth of a person to Hashem" (Vayikra 27:2).

Like the above story with barley, people were accustomed to making donations to the Beit Hamikdash by vowing to give the value of themselves or another person. Hashem instructs Moshe how to calculate this value by categorizing the Jewish people.

The Jewish people are split into 4 categories with each person in the category having the same "value". The Alshich explains that this evaluation is not based on the person's body or physical capabilities, rather it's based on their soul or spiritual component. In contrast to this pasuk, the gemara in Masechet Erchin (2a) tells us that if a person vows "דמי פלוני" the value of a person, they are vowing to donate a person's monetary value to the Beit Hamikdash. This evaluation is very different. The monetary value views a person as a commodity, like a slave or livestock, and calculates a person's worth based on their working or earning potential. The kohen would assess the individual's skills, health, and abilities to determine their market value. The Torah is telling us that there are two ways to measure the value of a person; we can view a person as a commodity like livestock or a slave (or barley), or we can view a person as the worth of their soul. The Torah does suggest that there is a time and place to assess a person as a commodity.

How skilled are they? What talents do they have? Do they work hard? What grades do they get?

People are different and they vary, however none of these components impact a person's worth. The worth of a person is determined by something intangible, their soul, by the mere fact that Hashem has decided that a particular person is needed in this world. The Torah needs to give us the set evaluation since it's not based on talents, skills, or how much one has accomplished or attained.

A man once asked a great rabbi the following question: "Why should I celebrate my birthday? So, I'm one year older, what's the big deal?" The rabbi's response was so insightful, I invite you to pause and take a moment to reflect on the depth of his answer. The rabbi replied, "We celebrate your birthday because it marks the day that Hashem recognized the world can no longer go on without you".

We live in a generation that falls into the trap of evaluating people based on their looks, talents, skills, grades, finances, job, etc. This generation often judges people as a commodity: How much are they worth based on their external attributes? Based on what they've done or haven't done? We often judge ourselves the same way: "I'm stupid" or "I don't have many friends". Our mirrors may attest to the many ways we judge ourselves based on our external accomplishments, how much we've done vs. how much we haven't. The Torah is telling us that we aren't looking deep enough.

If we truly want to know our worth then we have to look inside. We must see a component of ourselves that many might fail to see (including ourselves at times). Hashem is telling us that our worth isn't determined by our accomplishments, nor our looks, grades, or wallet. Our worth is determined by the mere fact that the world cannot go on without us. Hashem has placed us in this world because we are needed by our communities, our families, our friends, and by Hashem. We are needed exactly the way we are, regardless of our "market value".

Walk the Walk

Owen Sausen ('24)

We reach the end of Sefer Vayikra with Parshiyot Behar-Bechukotai. The question that arises is, what is Sefer Vayikra all about? What is the secret of this book? It is very different from all the other ones. It's very different from the stories of Bereishit, the redemption of Shmot, and the journey towards Eretz Yisrael in Sifrei Bamidbar and Devarim. Vayikra is primarily about *korbanot* and *tumah* and *tahara*. So, what is this sefer's unique significance? Maybe through three words from this week's parsha, we can understand it. The words are

אם בחקתי תלכו

"If you follow My laws" (Vayikra 26:3).

The Sfat Emet explains that the חקתי, the laws, represent the mind because they're the highest part of a person. Then he says that תלכו, to follow or walk, refers to the feet which is the lowest part. The secret of the word אם, "if," is the condition that Hashem is giving us, which is: can you relate the mind, the vision, and the ideals to the reality of the feet, to the outside world, to the differences, to the complicated realities? The Sfat Emet says that is the idea of Sefer Vayikra.

Sefer Vayikra is more about the feet than it is about the mind. It is more about the animals than it is about the visionaries. It is more about *korbanot* than it is about stories. It is telling us that the epicenter of Chumash is Sefer Vayikra, which is in the middle. It's saying to us that the תלכו is not minimizing the ideal, but instead defining the ideal. The ideal is only as great as one can correlate it to reality.

As we reach the end of Sefer Vayikra, we should be prepared to deal with the world of the feet. It's about realizing that the תלכו is giving the ideal a way to be actualized in real life. This means that it is not just some elevated concept to remain above, and it's not just about everything going on course. It means that I can deal with things in the outside world and stay on the proper path.

A Life With Others

Sophia Pearl ('24)

This week's double parsha is Behar-Bechukotai. These parshiyot mention and discuss many laws including *shmittah*, *yovel*, and other practical *halachot*. For example, the pasuk states,

"וחי אחיך עמך"
"Let your brothers live with you" (Vayikra 25:36).

At first glance, it is very difficult to understand the actual meaning of this pasuk as it can mean many different things.
Rabbi Akiva (Bava Metzia 62a) discusses this pasuk and says that it teaches us about the idea that
"חייך קודמים לחיי חברך"
"your life comes before your friend's life"

So, for example, two people are traveling and hiking on a difficult mountain in Guatemala and they have a limited amount of water. There is only enough supply of water for one person, therefore he may drink the water himself to survive even though it will cause his fellow traveler to die of thirst. However, the gemara in Kiddushin (20a) seems to contradict this first gemara. Here the gemara explains that one who acquires a Jewish slave is actually acquiring a master over himself. The Tosafot explain that the gemara is teaching us that if there is one pillow for a master and a slave, the slave should get the pillow. Now all of a sudden everything is contradicting. Rabbi Akiva suggested that you should worry about your own survival even if your friend will die, but then the Tosafot tell you to give the pillow to your slave and not keep it yourself. How does this make sense? Why are these two very similar ideas actually so contradictory?

When Rabbi Akiva explains the meaning of our original pasuk in this week's parsha, he references an extreme situation in which there is only enough water for one to survive and it is impossible for both to live. Therefore, in this particular case only, the rule is that your life comes first and you can drink that bottle of water. In any other case, Rabbi Akiva would agree a person is supposed to look out for his friend/brother and try to help him. Therefore, in the case of the slave, which is not an extreme life-or-death scenario, the master is commanded to make sure that the slave is well taken care of. That is why the master must give the pillow over to the slave so he can get a more comfortable sleep.

In conclusion, Rabbi Akiva's interpretation of the pasuk in Parshat Behar only applies to situations of life and death. When the issue is about comfort, you should give up your own "pillow" and give it to your friend/brother. This teaches us an important message. We shouldn't always look at the physical things in life and desire them for ourselves. Other people need our help and it's our responsibility to help them. Yes, it feels nice living the most comfortable and luxurious life, but think about a brother. Think about a friend. They might need your help and when they do, you should be there to help them. You should go over the top to make them feel more comfortable and offer them whatever they need. Good Shabbos.

Reflect

Akiva Lanner ('26)

Parshiyot Behar-Bechukotai, which conclude Sefer Vayikra, contain many important teachings on the topics of *shmittah*, *yovel*, and the consequences of following or disobeying God's commandments. One of the central messages of these parshiyot is the idea of treating others with fairness and compassion. This is exemplified in the laws of *shmittah* and *yovel*, which require that land and property be returned to its original owners every seven and fifty years, respectively, and that slaves be released after a certain amount of time. These laws remind us of the importance of social justice and the need to balance individual rights with the needs of the wider community.

Another key theme in Parshiyot Behar-Bechukotai is the idea that our actions have consequences. The Torah describes the blessings that will come to those who follow God's commandments, including prosperity, security, and peace, but also warns of the dire consequences that will result from disobedience. This serves as a reminder that we are responsible for our choices and that our actions have a ripple effect that can impact not only ourselves, but also those around us. As we reflect on the lessons of these parshiyot, may we be inspired

to live lives of fairness, compassion, and responsibility, and to work towards creating a just and peaceful world.

Shabbat Takeaway

Lauren Schebovitz ('26)

In Parshat Behar, we read the pasuk,

וְשָׁבְתָה הָאָרֶץ שַׁבָּת לַה׳

"The land shall observe a Shabbat, rest for Hashem" (Vayikra 25:2).

Rashi comments on the last two words of this pasuk, "for the name of Hashem, just as it was stated (in Shmot 20:10, in the Ten Commandments) when talking about Shabbat of creation, meaning Shabbat throughout the year.

Based on this we can ask the following question, what could possibly be the relationship between the *shemittah* year and Shabbat?

Shabbos was a day given to the Jewish people in order to renew and restore our faith and spirituality. During the week we are focused on work and school, rather than completely on Hashem. Due to this, Hashem has given us the opportunity once a week to have a day meant for our faith and our connection with Hashem. If that is the case, we should be working and devoting the day to working on our relationship with Hashem.

Rashi's message here is that the year of *shemittah* should be approached in the same way in which we treat Shabbat. During shemittah, we should be focusing more on learning Torah and Hashem, rather than focusing on the regular work that usually occupies the days and years of our lives.

Good Shabbos!

Staff

Editor-in-Chief
HANNAH MARKOVICH (' 24)
NAVA SHEKHTER (' 24)

Design Director
ABBY ROSENTHAL (' 23)
BRIANNA SHAMAH (' 23)
EDUARDO KORNWORCEL (' 24)

Editors
REBECCA ADLER (' 23)
ALIZA BOKOR (' 23)
HANNAH SHAPIRO (' 23)
ZOHARA LAM (' 23)
JUDAH FROLICH (' 23)
HILA BLANKA (' 23)
JOSH HAIK (' 24)
NAFTALI KEIFFER (' 23)
BINNY PERL (' 24)
MOMO MARCUS (' 24)
ARIEL GEDZ (' 24)

Monthly Contributors
SHUEY SILKIN (' 23)
ZACHY DENNIS (' 23)
ELISHA MARCUS (' 23)
ZEV HIRSCH (' 23)
ORLY DIMONT (' 23)
ATARA KEEHN (' 23)
SHOSHANA WEINSTOCK (' 24)
DAVEED WINOGRAD (' 24)
MALI BLANKA (' 24)
AKIVA SCHER (' 24)
OWEN SAUSEN (' 24)
AYDEN FRANK (' 23)
COTY BENNAROCH (' 24)
MADDIE LANDAU (' 24)
JONAH SCHENKER (' 23)
RACHEL CLARKE (' 24)

Faculty Advisor
RABBI AVI HOCHMAN

Developers
MEIRAV HOROWITZ (' 25)
ELAN HARRIS (' 25)

A KYHS PARSHA PUBLICATION

ravh@yeshivahs.org