

Beit Hamidrash Hameir Laarets | Issue 212

**Behar - Bechukotai** | Torah for Its Own Sake - The Holiness of the Torah's Letters



# MESILOT

## *Pathways to the Soul*

Illuminating teachings and insights on the weekly Parsha  
of **Rabbi Yoram Michael Abargel Zt"l**

From the weekly lessons of his son  
**Rabbi Yisrael Abargel Shlita**

פרשת בהר בחוקותי | אנגלית

# ...PATHWAYS TO THE SOUL...

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# **Parshat Behar-Bechukotai**

## **The Shepherd, the Treasure, and Us**

The righteous Rabbi Yissachar Dov of Belz, of blessed memory, once sat surrounded by his chassidim and related the following story:<sup>1</sup> “There were two farmers who were neighbors and friends and who each worked their plots of land and raised goats. They would milk the goats, churn the milk into cheese, and each market day, they would go to the city to sell their produce: a few vegetables and wheels of cheese.

One summer day, they rose early and took their goods to the big city, where they sold everything at a nice profit. They gathered their money and set off on the journey back to their village.

The sun beat down mercilessly, and they grew weary. Crossing a valley, one said to the other: ‘Look, there’s a nice shady tree. Let’s rest

a bit before we continue.’ They found the spot to be comfortable and decided to doze off.

But what about their money? They looked around and saw no one — not a soul, only some cows grazing in the distance. ‘Surely there’s nothing to worry about,’ they told themselves.

‘Really?’ one of them said apprehensively. ‘What if a cow comes sniffing around and swallows our money bags whole?’ That seemed far-fetched, but just in case, they decided to tie their bundles to a tree branch. After all, cows don’t climb trees. Feeling secure, they drifted into a pleasant sleep.

They had no idea that where there are cows, there is also a shepherd.

A young herder was sitting in the shade of some bushes not far away, hidden from view. He had heard their voices and had watched them through the gaps in the foliage. When the two dozed off, the shepherd crept over, untied the money bags, took them with him, and crouched behind the bushes.

When he looked inside, his eyes lit up — it was a treasure. But then fright struck him: ‘They’ll wake up soon, and when they see the money’s missing, they’ll search for the thief and surely find me. What can I do?’

A bold idea sprang to mind, and he decided to give it a try.

He emptied the coins into his pocket and filled the bags with the cows’ dung that was scattered around, and he then silently returned to the tree and hung them back on the branch.

Retreating again behind the bushes, he waited.

The sleepers awoke and, with alarm, looked up at the branch. Relieved to see the bundles still

there, they stretched their limbs and prepared to continue home. They reached up to retrieve the bags — and noticed they felt soft to the touch.

They were puzzled, and when they tried to untie them — it was very light in weight. Puzzled again, they opened them — and reeled back at the stench. It was cow dung.

They looked around in alarm but saw no one — only the grazing cows. They looked again at the cows, then at the bags, and tried to make sense of it all.

‘There’s no doubt,’ they said. ‘The cows must have done it.’ One wondered aloud: ‘But since when do cows climb trees?’ The other added: ‘And how did they untie the bags? And why, after eating our money, did they fill the bags with dung?’ In the end, they concluded, ‘They must be very strange cows,’ and they sadly resigned themselves to their loss.”

All those present who heard the story from the Belzer Rebbe laughed at the farmers’ naïveté and

foolishness — everyone but one: Rebbe Yissachar Dov's eldest son and successor, Rabbi Aharon of Belz, of blessed memory, stood beside his father, and he had turned pale and was trembling.

One of those present asked him, "Why are you so serious?"

He replied. "I don't understand how you can smile. When my father delivers such piercing words of rebuke, how could anyone smile?"

This happens to all of us. We all have a small treasure in our hands: plans we hope to implement, business deals we think will succeed, and profits we dream about.

We hatch our plans and act on them — but then suddenly, the wheel of fortune turns. Not only do we fail to profit, we often suffer losses. We open what we believe to have been a bag of coins and find it instead filled with dung.

We look around for answers and excuses. We notice the 'cows' and say, "Aha, that explains it."

Well, cows don't climb trees, they don't eat coins, they can't undo knots, and they don't fill bags with dung. We then conclude in resignation, "These must be strange cows," and give up.

The cows are a parable.

In life, we blame our competitors or our partners, the market conditions and the credit lines, the banks and the suppliers. We find plenty of scapegoats, even if the explanation truly makes no sense.

What we fail to realize is that wherever there are 'cows,' there is also a shepherd.

We forget that the divine Shepherd is watching and directing events.

He is the One doing all things — past, present, and future — and the cows are merely a cover. The treasure is truly in His hands, and it is up to us to make the proper decisions.

How long must we mistakenly keep explaining that everything is merely by chance? When will

we understand that everything, absolutely everything, is G-d's

work and for a divine ultimate purpose?"

### The Horse Hair Reminder

This perception and understanding requires constant maintenance and reminders; it is something that needs to constantly be remembered and made aware of.

In this context, we share the following story:

In one of Poland's famous cities lived a pious Jew, a Torah scholar who served G-d with all his might.

Although in that era, there were countless Torah scholars, everyone who met this man remembered him. The reason? The unusual color of his hair: all of his hair was bright orange. There was another unusual feature to this great scholar: He always wore around his arm a strap made of horse hair.

Most people did not notice it because he made sure his shirt sleeve covered the strap. Yet every so often, the sleeve would

shift, revealing it. Then, questions would be asked, but he would simply dismiss them with a charming smile.

Many years passed, and one day, a holy and righteous man visited the city. The townspeople, who greatly revered him, prepared his lodgings and gathered there to bask in his presence.

The orange-haired scholar also came to pay his respects and to request a blessing. The righteous man, seeing a great light resting upon the scholar's face, seated him beside him and asked for a cup of tea to be brought before him.

As the scholar reached out for the cup, his sleeve rose a bit, revealing the strap wrapped on his arm. The righteous man was astonished and asked him: "What is that?"

The scholar said quietly: "I've never told anyone about this, but in deference to your great Torah

**Parshat Behar-Bechukotai - The Horse Hair Reminder**

stature, I cannot refuse your question.” He began at once to share his tale:

“In the small village where I was born, I stood out starkly. While everyone had dark-colored hair and eyes, as you can see, my hair was — and still is — bright orange.

I was the village laughingstock — whatever happened, whatever went wrong, they always blamed ‘the orange kid’. I felt out of place and unwelcome, and my self-confidence quickly eroded to the point that I stopped paying attention to the lessons in cheder, my elementary Torah school.

In my seventh year in cheder, a new teacher arrived, and as the saying goes, ‘a new broom sweeps well;’ he decided to tackle all of the problems in the class — and that also meant me.

He did everything he could to boost my spirits and restore my self-confidence, but all to no avail. The scorn and mockery of my peers were stronger than all of his best efforts.

One morning, the principal and the regional supervisor entered our classroom. The teacher called me over and asked me to go and make three cups of tea for them.

I tried to refuse, but he insisted. I prepared the tea, placed the cups on a tray, and walked back to the classroom, stepping very carefully.

I opened the door, made my way to the teacher’s desk, and just one moment before setting it down — the cups slipped from the tray, shattering on the teacher’s foot.

Uproarious laughter filled the room, and I, overcome by shame, began to cry and back away.

Suddenly, I shouted, ‘That’s it, I’ve had enough; I’m leaving.’ I opened the door, stormed out, and started to run. I ended up at the center of the village, near the coach stop. There, around their wagons, stood a group of drivers waiting for passengers. On the spot, I decided, ‘This is the job for me.’

That was how it all began. In time, I managed to purchase my own horse and wagon, and I established a small transport service from the village to the big city.

As the years went by, I got married and had children. Still, despite settling into life, I always felt people regarded me as ‘that orange fellow,’ and it did nothing good for my self-confidence.

One day, I set out as usual. But this time, I couldn’t find a single passenger, and in the end, I decided to leave for the city anyway, with an empty wagon.

Along the way, to my surprise, I saw a man who looked just as orange as I was — all of his hair, eyebrows, and beard were all bright orange. I rubbed my eyes again and again, never having seen anyone so similar to me in appearance, and when he flagged me down, I let him aboard.

While traveling, we came upon roadwork and had to take a detour. I was in a hurry, so I opted for a route I didn’t know very well. Partway along, the

horses slipped, dragging the wagon behind them, and before I knew it, the wagon tumbled into the nearby river.

The orange passenger who alighted was killed on the spot, and I was swept far downstream, with my last bit of strength, I managed to drag myself to shore, where I lost consciousness.

When I came to, I found myself in a place I didn’t recognize. Gathering my wits, I set off toward home.

Near the village, I saw a funeral procession. I stood aside and thought, ‘A funeral in our village? Who died so suddenly?’

I hid to watch from a distance, and to my shock, I realized that they believed I was the one who had died.

Apparently, they had found my orange-haired passenger near my wagon and assumed that it was me.

I watched covertly as they carried on to the cemetery, laid



**Parshat Behar-Bechukotai - The Horse Hair Reminder**

down the bier, and began to eulogize. One after another, all of my old ‘classmates’ stepped up to the lectern, and to my utter amazement, every single one of them spoke of my praise — what a good man I was, how talented, how beloved.

My heart filled with anger. If only they had told me all of these things when I was “still alive”, maybe I wouldn’t have ended up a simple wagon driver.’

Then, my sense of anger gave way to pity for myself — and for them: ‘These people are so fickle. One day they’re mocking me, the next day they’re lauding me. One moment I’m “the problem” of the cheder, and in the next I’m the “budding flower” of the town.’

‘Was it from people like this, who have no stability, that I let myself be hurt? Because of flimsy folks like them, I lost out on all of my opportunities in life?’

I began to shout out: ‘I’m sick and tired of all of the hypocrisy,

I’m sick of the shallow way you all look at the world.’

Suddenly I felt someone shaking me. I opened my eyes and realized I was still in the classroom.

“It turned out,” continued the scholar, “that after dropping the tray of tea, I slunk back to my seat and fell asleep, and all of what I beheld happened only in my dream.

Although it was only a dream, the lesson on resilience in life and utilization of one’s abilities didn’t leave me. Fearing that I might forget it someday, I fashioned a bracelet from horse hair to remind me of the time ‘I had been’ a wagon driver. This cognization helped me endure all of the humiliation until I attained whatever Torah knowledge and merit that I have today.”

Thus, we see that to remember and be constantly aware of the Shepherd, of G-d’s constant presence, one needs reminders and signposts along the way.

One such reminder is described in 'Shulchan HaTahor'<sup>2</sup> where it is explained that when G-d sends the soul down into this world, He tells it that although it is descending to a 'dangerous' place, a place where one may forget of His existence, nonetheless,

through reciting the blessings daily with mindful intent, one will be reminded of Him.<sup>3</sup>

Thus, in order to properly remember G-d, our Shepherd, one must recite the blessings with true intention before taking benefit from the worldly pleasures.

### Wellsprings of Wisdom

2. Ma'amar Kavanat HaBerachot, Chapter 1.

3. We share the following story about the power of these blessings ('BeNoam Siach', Vayikra, p. 35):

A baal teshuva once invited his close friends — those from his pre-observant days — to his home for an evening of Torah lectures.

He had served them slices of watermelon as refreshments, and when he briefly left the room to bring additional food, he overheard a heated debate among his friends about the appropriate blessing to recite over the watermelon.

Out of respect for their now-religious host, they didn't want to eat without a blessing, and each had voiced their opinion:

"Watermelon is a fruit," said one, "so the blessing should be 'borei pri ha'etz'."

"Well it depends on where the fruit grows," countered another. "Watermelon

grows from the ground, so the blessing should be 'borei pri ha'adama'."

"I'll tell you all," declared a more assertive friend, "the blessing is 'shehakol nihiya bidvaro'."

When their host returned, they eagerly shared their debate with him.

Smiling graciously, he clarified, "The correct blessing is indeed 'borei pri ha'adama', of course."

The matter seemed settled until the assertive friend interrupted, "No, that is not the case. The blessing must be 'shehakol nihiya bidvaro', and I'm telling you — it always works."

Several puzzled pairs of eyes were staring at him. Sensing their bewilderment, he recounted:

"We were a group of tank operators during the Yom Kippur War, fighting in the Sinai Desert. Our platoon was tasked with attacking an Egyptian outpost, which seemed quite feasible at first. But the

## Peace or Pieces ?

This story about the dramatic life change of the 'orange fellow'

reminds us of a question posed by the Chatam Sofer:<sup>4</sup>

### *~ Wellsprings of Wisdom ~*

Egyptians launched precise counterstrikes, nearly obliterating all of our tanks.

retreated. We had completed our mission.

In desperation, our commander shouted, 'Does anyone know of a prayer that we can say to beseech G-d to save us?' We were silent; none of us knew any prayers.

Now, you tell me," the storyteller challenged his friends, "if this blessing worked so well to destroy Egyptian tanks, don't you think it works for watermelon too?"

Finally, one soldier hesitantly spoke, 'I know a short prayer my religious grandfather taught me: 'Baruch Ata Hashem Elokeinu Melech Ha'olam, shehakol nihiya bidvaro'.'

His tale was met with applause and laughter, leaving everyone awestruck by the miraculous rescue.

The commander, ecstatic, ordered us to prepare to fire a shell. He instructed that before we fire each shell, we recite this blessing together at the top of our lungs.

The religious host, however, sat quietly, reflecting:

We followed his orders, crying out with all our hearts, 'Baruch Ata Hashem Elokeinu Melech Ha'olam, shehakol nihiya bidvaro.'

"Master of the Universe," he thought, "how great are Your children. When those Jewish soldiers cried out in desperation, You did not gaze at their distance from You or their estrangement from the Torah. You miraculously responded to their heartfelt cries and delivered them from their predicament."

The first shell we fired, struck the fuel tank of an Egyptian tank, setting it ablaze.

This is the power of prayer and the recitation of blessings — it is a genuine plea that pierces the heavens.

'Another tank is aiming at us!' shouted a soldier. We readied another shell and again shouted the blessing. Miraculously, we hit the second tank in its turret and it erupted in flames.

As the verse says: 'The L-rd is near to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him in truth' (Tehillim 145:18).

This continued, one tank after another, until the remaining Egyptian tanks

**4. 'Drashot Chatam Sofer'** (Part 1, Drasha for 7 Adar 5599):

‘It is written: “My soul has dwelled too long with those who hate peace” (Psalms 120:6). The Midrash Tehillim on the verse explains that “those who hate peace” refers to Esav the wicked, who despises peace. By contrast, the Jewish people are called ‘lovers of peace,’ and G-d’s blessing to the Jewish people is peace, as it is written: ‘G-d will give strength to His people; G-d will bless His people with peace’ (Psalms 29:11).

However, all too often we observe the opposite to be true in practice: there is to a certain degree more exacting standards and discord among Jews than among the nations of the world. Among Torah scholars especially, one finds even more harshness and conflict than among simple laborers.

### The Work of Human Hands

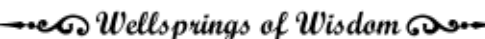
In the Book of Kohelet it says:  
 “See this which I have found,  
 that G-d made man upright; but  
 they have sought many schemes”  
 (Ecclesiastes 7:29).

Our Sages say:<sup>5</sup> ‘Kohanim are quick-tempered,’ as it is written: ‘and your people are like those quarrelling Kohens’ (Hosea 4:4). And indeed, the Jewish people as a whole are called ‘Kohanim’ in relation to the nations of the world, as it says: ‘You shall be for Me a kingdom of Kohanim’ (Exodus 19:6) — and thus we naturally can be more severe and ‘exacting’ than all of the other nations.”

The Chatam Sofer concludes his question: "If that is the case, why are the nations of the world called ‘those who hate peace,’ while the Jewish people are called ‘lovers of peace’ ?”

To understand his answer, we need to first introduce some background.

Rashi comments: “‘Which G-d made’ — the Holy One, blessed be He, created Adam upright; ‘But they’ — from the time that Eve was paired with



him and they became two; ‘they’ — ‘sought many schemes’ — they devised plans and thoughts of sin.”

To explain this idea: On the sixth day of Creation, G-d created a wondrous being and called it “Adam.”

“Adam” was literally the handiwork of G-d, as it states: “which G-d made Man,” and he was perfect in every imaginable way.

Afterward, G-d created Eve and brought her to Adam. Once they were paired together, they ultimately sinned by eating from the Tree of Knowledge. From that moment of sin onward, they

became a different reality — one far removed from true purity.<sup>6</sup>

That new state was, in effect, the work and effect of human hands. This state of being was an ‘alien’ reality compared to the original, natural reality in which Adam had been created.

To quote the words of Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe:<sup>7</sup>

“From the moment Adam sinned, the evil inclination entered into Man. The evil inclination is a ‘foreign g-d’ that is lodged in man, and its craft is to draw him into idolatry. Simply said, the evil inclination is a force of alienation within a

— *Wellsprings of Wisdom* —

**6.** From the moment that Adam and his wife sinned and ate from the Tree of Knowledge, evil and impurity entered their foundational elements of their bodies, namely: fire, wind, water, and earth.

This is what ultimately caused the emergence of negative traits and forbidden desires within them.

In the words of Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto (‘Maamar HaIkarim’, Chapter on

Reward):

“The impurity was absorbed into the body, making it impossible for it to achieve a connection with the divine while this impurity remains within it.

Thus, one can only rid oneself of it through death and returning to dust. Then, it will be cleansed and rebuilt entirely, all without any impurity.”

**7.** ‘AleI Shur’ (vol. 2, p. 83).

person, as in the verse in Mishlei (Mishlei 21:8): ‘The way of a man is perverse and alien’.

The evil inclination is a surging force that grows wildly beyond all bounds, exaggerating and intensifying one’s traits and capabilities and applying them where they do not belong, and inciting man to actual sin.

It is an alien force within a person, and if it gains control over him, he becomes alienated from himself, alienated from others, and alienated from his Creator.

Not for nothing is idol worship called ‘foreign worship’, for one who engages in it becomes removed from and a stranger to his own true reality.

Indeed, every bad character trait contains some form of alienation, as the Rosh writes in Orchos Chaim (Day 1, section 24): ‘Distance yourself from excessive laughter and anger, because they confound a person’s spirit and mind.’ The confusion referred to here as well, arises from the power of alienation.

In Mishlei, King Solomon said: ‘Jealousy is rottenness to the bones’ (Proverbs 14:30). That is meant quite literally: one who is jealous sees only good in others, while the good that is within himself — he either fails to see or belittles, and such a person becomes detached from himself until his own capacities decay.

Likewise, greed for money and pleasure, and the pursuit of honor — these drive a person out of his senses until he becomes totally unrecognizable even to himself. Indeed, jealousy, lust, and seeking honor take a person out of the world — that is, out of his inner, true world as well.

An arrogant person is so alienated from himself that he does not recognize or see himself as he truly is.

The sense of estrangement is felt most keenly with anger. After one’s anger subsides, a person is often astonished at how in his rage he was ‘not himself’ — he actually became someone else in that moment.

**Parshat Behar-Bechukotai - Inner Birth**

Just as bad character traits make a person a stranger to himself, so too they alienate him from others: ‘He who separates himself seeks his own desire; he rises up against all sound wisdom’ (Proverbs 18:1).

Every bad trait harms others and cuts a person off from friends and companions, and most importantly, just as bad traits separate a person from others, so too they separate one from his Creator. Those same flawed character traits operate in both

interpersonal relations and in relation to G-d, making such a person estranged from his Creator.

It transforms a person into a stranger to himself, to others, and to his Creator: truly a stranger, without feeling, without understanding, without connection, and without love.

It is this force that resides in every bad trait; how much more so if a person harbors several bad traits, and is ruled by them.”

## **Inner Birth**

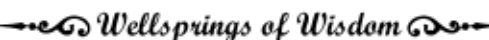
As noted above, from the moment of the dreadful calamity of the sin of the Tree of Knowledge, humanity descended from the lofty status of being G-d’s handiwork, and for hundreds of years they all remained mired in that lowly state.

Nevertheless, we do find a few individuals who managed to raise themselves and fashion themselves into something resembling G-d’s

own handiwork, reclaiming and returning to that purity and clarity with which G-d had first created man.

Such people were the righteous of their generation, who sustained the entire world in their times, two of which were Noah and Shem.

As we find in the words of the holy Rabbi Eliezer Horowitz on the following two verses:<sup>8</sup>



8. ‘Noam Megadim V’Kavod HaTorah’ (beginning of Noah).

“These are the offspring of Noah — Noah was a righteous, perfect man” (Genesis 6:9).

“And to Shem was born, he as well; he was the father of all the children of Eber and the brother of Yefet the elder” (Genesis 10:21).

“Regarding the verse, ‘And to Shem was born, he as well,’ the wording seems unclear. It should have seemingly stated, ‘**to him** as well,’ so what is the meaning of the phrase ‘**he** as well’ ?

This can be understood based on a well-known principle (which we will expand upon further on) that when a person merits to learn the Torah and to observe it — and in addition purifies himself from lowly desires and negative character traits — it is as if he had been reborn and ‘given birth’ to himself. It is as though he has fashioned his very being.

That is the intention of the verse: ‘And to Shem was born, he as well,’ meaning, Shem was a righteous man who

studied the Torah and refined himself for Divine service, and consequently, in addition to being ‘the father of all the children of Eber,’ he effectively gave birth to himself, ‘Shem was born, he as well’.

We can similarly explain the verse regarding Noah, ‘These are the offspring of Noah — Noah’: i.e., through his righteousness — especially as he remained righteous despite living in a corrupt generation — through this, he went through a process of rebirth himself.

That is why the name is repeated twice: to indicate that because he was a righteous man, it was considered as though he had ‘fathered’ himself.”

However, although the Torah here hints to these exalted individuals achievements, it does not describe in detail how they accomplished this — what specific method or path enabled them to achieve such a lofty status.



## “And You Are All Children of the Most High”

On the sixth of Sivan in the year 2448 to Creation, the nation of Israel merited to stand at the foot of Mount Sinai and receive the Torah. There, at the foot of Mount Sinai, they once more attained that original state — of being “the handiwork of G-d.”

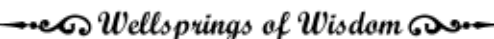
The great kabbalist, Rabbi Moshe Shapira, wrote about the lofty state of the Jewish people at this time:<sup>9</sup>

Concerning the first Tablets, it is stated: “And the Tablets were the work of G-d, and the writing was the writing of G-d, engraved upon the Tablets” (Shemot 32:16). The Tablets themselves were ‘the work of G-d’, the script was ‘the writing of G-d’, and it was ‘engraved upon the Tablets.’ The engraved writing became united as one with the Tablet itself — and the engraved letters were hewn into the stone such that the writing and the Tablet become as one, similar to what is written:

“Inscribe them on the tablet of your heart” (Proverbs 3:3). In the giving of the first Tablets, this was fulfilled perfectly: as it were, the Torah was written on the tablet of the Jewish people’s heart and was ‘engraved’ upon it.

The famous verse in Ezekiel — “I will give you a new heart and a new spirit I will put within you; I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh” (Ezekiel 36:26) — was actually realized at Mount Sinai. At that time, G-d took the heart we previously had and gave us a different heart instead — one that was Divine handiwork — capable of becoming fused and united with whatever divine instruction was inscribed upon it.

It was not merely upon the heart, but also within it; the heart and the script were truly one. This was the reality represented by the first Tablets we received at Sinai.



9. Cited in ‘Osef Gilyonot’ (Issue 25 – Pinchas 5777, page 2).

## **Fashioning Oneself**

Forty days had passed from the revelation at Mount Sinai, and on the seventeenth of Tammuz some of the Jewish people succumbed to their worst inclinations and bowed to the Golden Calf — “They have made themselves a molten calf, bowed to it, and sacrificed to it” (Exodus 32:8). The sin of the Golden Calf was an act of collective idolatry, which once again lowered humanity’s level from being ‘G-d’s handiwork’. As it is written, “I had said: You are G-dlike beings, and all of you are children of the Most High; but indeed, like man you shall die, and fall like one of the princes” (Psalms 82:6–7).

Rashi comments on this:

“‘Indeed, like man you shall die’ — indeed, like Adam, you shall die, having corrupted your deeds as he did.”

Since they had descended from their lofty level, estrangement from the divine once again entered them, and the desire for ‘foreign g-ds’ raged within them. But this time, G-d did not leave them in that state; He revealed Himself to Moses and said:

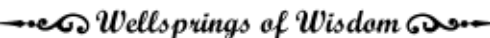
“If you walk in My statutes, and keep My commandments, and do them” (Leviticus 26:3), the Midrash explains:<sup>10</sup>

“‘And do them’ — Rabbi Chanina bar Papi said: G-d said to them, ‘If you preserve the Torah, I will consider it as though you have made and fashioned yourselves.’”

This idea is repeated once more in the Book of Deuteronomy:

“And G-d commanded me at that time to teach you statutes and judgments to do them” (Deuteronomy 4:14).

And the Midrash expounds:<sup>11</sup>



10. Vayikra Rabbah (35:7).

11. Midrash Rabbi Tanchuma (Ki Tavo, 1).

“‘To do them’ — Rabbi Yochanan said: Anyone who truly fulfills the Torah, the Torah regards it as if he made himself, as it says: ‘And G-d commanded me at that time to teach... to do them.’ It does not say ‘to do it,’ but rather, ‘to do them’ — from here we learn that it is considered as if one ‘created’ himself.”

From here and on, throughout Jewish history, every Jew must strive to attain that same level of wholeness of heart that existed at Mount Sinai.

When one succeeds in doing so, it is considered as though he has fashioned himself, for he has ascended back to the level of ‘Divine handiwork’.

### **Ascending Through the Power of Torah**

The path to ‘Divine handiwork’ is a long and often arduous one, and on this matter, we quote the words of Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe, of blessed memory, (‘Aleí Shur’, vol. 2, p. 109):

“Had we merited the first Tablets, the Torah would never have been forgotten by us (Eiruvín 54a), nor would the Angel of Death or the nations of the world have held sway over us (Avodah Zarah 5a).

We would have then attained a lofty spiritual state akin to the resurrection of the dead, and

our engagement in Torah would have been on a completely different plane than it is now, after the sin of the Golden Calf.

However, since the ‘Calf’ reared its head, the first Tablets were broken, and in their stead we received the second Tablets.

The day the second Tablets were given was a renewed Giving of the Torah and a renewed commitment and acceptance of it. Through the second Tablets, we merited that the Holy One, blessed

be He, dwells with us even in our state of impurity, G-d forbid.<sup>12</sup>

From that time and onward, our primary task is the battle against the evil inclination, and concerning this, it is said: 'I created the evil inclination, and I created the Torah as its remedy' (Kiddushin 30b).

Consequently, the entire Torah, including to its loftiest levels, serves as a remedy for the evil inclination, and whoever toils sufficiently in it, merits to temper his evil inclination and transform it to the good.

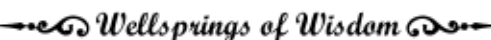
This power is granted exclusively to the Torah. Although there are various ways to fight the inclination: through provoking it, subduing it, overpowering it (Sanhedrin 111b), or engaging in conversation with it (Gittin 57a). These are methods of waging war against it.

But within the Torah, there is yet another path, loftier than all the others, and that is by rising above the challenge.

The analogy is a child who rides a stick, calling it a 'horse.' Once he grows up, he simply no longer does that, because he now knows the stick is not a horse. He doesn't have to battle or persuade himself; he has simply matured.

Yet the evil inclination poses a threat so formidable that even its Creator calls it 'evil' (Kiddushin 30b), as it is written: 'For the inclination of man's heart is evil from his youth' (Genesis 8:21); it is a harsh and difficult creation.

It is true that there is no place empty of His presence — "The whole earth is filled with His glory" (Isaiah 6:3) — and every creature, from the sun, down to the tiniest worm, is a tiny spark of His glory. In every good deed, there is closeness to the Creator,



**12.** As it is stated: "Who dwells with them in the midst of their impurity" (Vayikra 16:16).

and so too in every good word  
and every good thought.

However, He created, as it were, a reality of distance from Him — a void that contains no spark of His glory: the possibility of sin. Every sin conceals a measure of separation from the Creator.

There are many degrees to this separation. A minor sin may have created a small chasm, though in general the person remains close to G-d. A sin incurring karet severs a person from the 'tree,' cutting off the

flow of his spiritual vitality. And as for the three cardinal sins — idolatry, forbidden relations, and murder — the distance is absolute; no closeness to G-d can exist with such transgressions.

Being that the creation of evil is so wondrous, it follows then that the creation of the Torah — its remedy — is doubly so, for it can transform that empty void of sin into a place of closeness to the Creator and 'temper' the evil inclination so that it becomes a positive force in the life of a Jew.<sup>13</sup>

*~ Wellsprings of Wisdom ~*

**13.** In the Talmud (Makkot 22b), it is stated: "How foolish are people who stand up before a Torah scroll but do not stand up before a great Torah scholar."

When the great Torah scholar, Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, taught this passage from the Talmud, he explained it as follows:

A Torah scholar possesses two aspects within himself. The first is his knowledge of the Torah, which allows him to be asked about the word of G-d.

The second is that through his Torah study, he ascends and sanctifies himself with ascendant eternal holiness.

Now, these 'foolish people' are those who only recognize the scholar's knowledge of Torah.

They fail to understand that one must feel awe and reverence for the scholar himself, for while he engages in Torah study, he is constantly elevating, sanctifying, and drawing himself closer to G-d — even more so than the Torah scroll.

How foolish are those who feel awe only for the Torah scroll but not for Torah scholars.

Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach explained that while rising for the elderly is obligatory as a matter of respect and

**The Power of Torah Lishmah**

At this point, let us quote from Chelev Ha'aretz:

Very soon, G-d willing, when we merit the complete redemption, the verse will be fulfilled: "Eye to eye shall they see when the L-rd returns to Zion" (Isaiah 52:8), and likewise: "Your Teacher shall no longer be hidden from you, and your eyes shall behold your Teacher" (ibid. 30:20).

A well-known question arises: the verse states, "Man shall not see Me and live" (Exodus 33:20). So how, in the Messianic era, will a person be able to 'see' G-d, and still be left alive?

Or in other words: What change will take place in the Messianic era that will enable human beings to behold G-d's presence?

We find that Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, of saintly

memory, writes in Tanya as follows (Likkutei Amarim, ch. 36):

In the time of Mashiach, G-d will grant the righteous a special ability to behold His Divine light directly, without any concealment. If not for this extraordinary empowerment that He will bestow at that time, they could not continue to exist at all, for when the Divine light is revealed in the world, it will annihilate and nullify all other existence.

Yet, the instrument for receiving this supreme power — enabling one to stand before such an exalted light and "see the glory of G-d" — is the Torah study we engage in specifically during the world's current darkness and exile.

This is the mystical interpretation of the verse: "The L-rd will give oz (strength) to His people" (Psalms 29:11). "Oz"

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*Wellsprings of Wisdom*

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courtesy, regarding Torah scholars however, one must additionally be

aware and recognize their supreme stature ('Chiko Mamtakim', page 246).

means strength, and “will give” is stated here in the future tense.

The Gemara (Zevachim 116a) interprets this verse as referring to the Torah having been given to the Jewish people.

In other words, through the power of the Torah that they study in this world during exile, the Jewish people will be able to receive the Divine illumination and endure it without being nullified.

The reason the Torah has such immense power — so great that it grants those who study it the capacity to endure the Divine light and delight in the radiance of the Shechinah in the future — is that the Supreme Being, blessed be He, concealed His own essence, as it were, within the letters of the holy Torah. Consequently, those who study it for its own sake merit to bond with G-d’s light itself.

This is the inner meaning of the statement in the Gemara (Shabbat 105a) concerning the verse,

“I am the L-rd your G-d, Who brought you out of the land of

Egypt, out of the house of bondage” (Exodus 20:2). ‘I am’ (אֲנִי) — our Sages teach — is an acronym for (אֲנִי נִפְשִׁי כְּתוּבִית יְהוּדִית): “I Myself have written and given My essence via the Torah.” That is, in the letters of the Torah, the Blessed Holy One, as it were, placed His infinite essence within finite form.

The 27 letters of the Holy Tongue (the standard 22 plus five final letters) embody an extremely lofty and spiritual reality, and within each letter dwell pure, sacred angels on high who live by the holiness vested in those letters. Thus, the 22 visible letters of the Torah, as we see them in the scroll or in books, are but their outer form. Within them lies an infinitely elevated and holy spiritual reality — a reality that is termed “Worlds, Souls, Divinity.”

Hence, the purpose of every Jew, when engaged in Torah and prayer, is that in each word he utters, to attach his nefesh (basic life force), ruach (spirit), and neshamah (soul) to the supernal angels and holy souls that dwell

## Parshat Behar-Bechukotai - Between the Jewish people and the Nations

in the “worlds” within those letters, and to the Infinite Light that sustains these souls and angels that are embedded there.

It is thus quite clear that every single letter of the Torah serves as a powerful instrument, bringing forth an awe-inspiring higher force and a tremendous Divine vitality to the entire world — and especially to a person who studies.

From all this, it follows that the first step for studying the Torah is to muster the resolve to connect to the holiness of the letters and to be subsumed within them.

Through the power of Torah study, he then elevates these letters to their supernal root, effecting a true, complete, and perfect rectification.

## Between the Jewish people and the Nations

When it arose in G-d's will to create the souls of mankind, He created two types of souls:

The first type: holy and pure souls, beautiful and refined.

A student of Torah must bear in mind to have intention to forge an eternal bond with the Torah, namely that through studying and engaging in the Torah, he should merit to attach his soul to G-d — namely, to unite his soul with the Infinite Light of G-d, which resides and shines in each letter of the holy Torah, and to bind himself to the holiness of the Torah's origin.

This then consequently draws down a higher illumination from G-d onto his soul, extending even more Divine light upon him from above to below.

Now let us return to the Chatam Sofer's question: Why is Esav called “one who hates peace”?

The second type: hollow and empty souls, ones that lack any inner essence.

For many long years, these two types were intermingled. Often,



**Parshat Behar-Bechukotai - Between the Jewish people and the Nations**

in the same family, there might be one child with a holy soul and another with an empty soul.

However, when our forefather Jacob (who would later receive the name “Israel”) came into the world, he succeeded — by virtue of his astoundingly dedicated service to G-d — in separating out all those souls. He took for himself all the holy souls, which thereafter received a new name: the souls of the Jewish people.

From that point onward, the phrase “Blessed be the One who distinguishes between the Jewish people and the nations” took on real meaning. The souls of the Jewish people are perfect in every way, drawing their vitality from holiness, and they have sources that perpetually flow with life and inner longing. They are essentially good, and since good naturally seeks to do good for others, such souls benefit everyone and are mindful of their fellow man, and especially of the Creator.

By contrast, the souls of the nations are entirely lacking, deriving their existence and sustenance from impurity, spiritual desolation, and emptiness. Consequently, at their core, they are self-centered and egotistic and recognize the existence of others only when it serves their own interests.

All souls of the nations are hollow and empty, with no true inner life. They sense and perceive only their own reality — nothing else. And since, in truth, their reality is nothingness, and they likewise view the reality around them as nothing.

To be sure, a Jew whose inner self is radiant and deep will never truly grasp or fathom how hollow and empty the soul of a non-Jew can be.

And thus — says the Chatam Sofer — the fact that the nations of the world typically live quietly and calmly, not prone to quarreling, does not stem from any virtue. On the contrary, it stems from deficiency. Within

their inner world, there is no movement at all; everything inside is dead, lacking vitality or motion. And you can hardly provoke someone who is “dead,” and hence they do not get angered easily.

However, when the moment does come that they do get angry, then there is no stopping them. For, by their essential nature, they despise true peace. They will not be placated until they kill, eliminate, and utterly destroy — mercilessly — those they hate.

Not so the people of Israel, whose inner realm is full of light, vitality, and joy. Precisely for this reason, they are extremely sensitive to every small stir or movement. The more refined and pure one’s inner world is the more heightened one’s sensitivity.

Yet despite their intense sensitivity, the essence of the Jewish people is to love peace. Even if a quarrel breaks out — Heaven forbid — they are easily appeased and forgiven readily.

“Master of the Universe. Who is like Your nation Israel?”

### **Am Yisrael Chai**

We will close with the words of Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler:<sup>14</sup>

“A person’s entire life is a continuous striving to attain what he feels he is missing.

When he achieves what he desires, he experiences a kind of renewal, for he perceives he has acquired something new that he lacked before. The more such

feelings of renewal he experiences, the more his sense of life becomes intensified.

In past achievements, which are limited and devoid of further aspiration or desire, the sense of vitality is lacking; those achievements belong to the past, and one’s awareness of them is ‘dead.’

**Parshat Behar-Bechukotai - Summary and Practical Conclusions**

For this reason, anyone who is attached to material pursuits will eventually lose all appetite and desire for them — his life is then no life at all.

One who clings to spirituality, however, finds his life to be rich beyond measure, for he will always feel renewed vitality and upward interest. His interests and aspirations will then be

both great and varied, and his heart will be like a wellspring ever rising, its flow of vitality unending.

When one merits true heartfelt attachment to G-d — he achieves continual renewal.

For the one who cleaves to G-d, it fills the content of his life at all times, and only such a life as this can truly be called life.”

**Summary and Practical Conclusions**

1. Had we merited to receive and preserve the First Tablets, the Torah would never have been forgotten by us for all time, nor would the Angel of Death or the nations of the world have ever had dominion over us.

At that lofty level, our engagement with Torah would have been entirely different from how we engage with it now following the sin of the Golden Calf. After the sin of the Calf, the First Tablets were shattered, and in their place, we received the Second Tablets that were given in a renewed Matan Torah, with a renewed acceptance of the Torah.

Through the Second Tablets, we merited that the Divine Presence dwells even in a state of impurity.

2. From that point on, our main task is battling the evil inclination. About this, our Sages say: “I created the evil inclination, and I created the Torah as its antidote.”

Thus, the purpose of Torah study, up to its loftiest levels, is to serve as a ‘spice’ and counterbalance for the evil inclination. Anyone who toils in its study properly merits to temper his inclination and transform it into good. 3. The Holy One, blessed be He, concealed His primordial and innermost light and goodness within the letters of the Torah, and thus, whoever studies Torah for its own sake merits a true connection to G-d. 4. The 27 letters of the Holy Tongue (the standard 22 plus five letters’

## Parshat Behar-Bechukotai - Summary and Practical Conclusions

final forms) embody a supremely lofty spiritual light.

Within each individual letter reside pure, holy angels of the celestial heights, who live by the holiness of these letters. Contained within them is an infinitely exalted and sacred spiritual reality.

5. Therefore, every Jew's primary goal — when engaged in Torah study and prayer, and with each word he recites — is to link his soul: nefesh, ruach, and neshamah to those angels on high and to the holy souls that dwell and live in the spiritual worlds contained within those letters, and to the Infinite Light that sustains those souls and angels.

Thus, every single letter of the holy Torah is a powerful vessel for drawing

forth immense energy and divine vitality to the entire world, and especially upon oneself.

6. One who studies Torah must connect to the holiness of these letters, and through the power of Torah study, he is able to elevate these letters to their highest source and perfect them with a complete rectification.

One should also have the intention when studying Torah, to forge an eternal bond and unite his soul with G-d — connecting his soul to the Infinite Light that shines within every single letter of the Torah.

One thereby draws an even higher light from G-d upon his soul, and further extends a divine light upon all of creation.

### Shabbat Shalom!



# **Parshat Behar-Bechukotai**

## **The Shepherd, the Treasure, and Us**

The righteous Rabbi Yissachar Dov of Belz, of blessed memory, once sat surrounded by his chassidim and related the following story:<sup>1</sup> “There were two farmers who were neighbors and friends and who each worked their plots of land and raised goats. They would milk the goats, churn the milk into cheese, and each market day, they would go to the city to sell their produce: a few vegetables and wheels of cheese.

One summer day, they rose early and took their goods to the big city, where they sold everything at a nice profit. They gathered their money and set off on the journey back to their village.

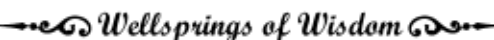
The sun beat down mercilessly, and they grew weary. Crossing a valley, one said to the other: ‘Look, there’s a nice shady tree. Let’s rest

a bit before we continue.’ They found the spot to be comfortable and decided to doze off.

But what about their money? They looked around and saw no one — not a soul, only some cows grazing in the distance. ‘Surely there’s nothing to worry about,’ they told themselves.

‘Really?’ one of them said apprehensively. ‘What if a cow comes sniffing around and swallows our money bags whole?’ That seemed far-fetched, but just in case, they decided to tie their bundles to a tree branch. After all, cows don’t climb trees. Feeling secure, they drifted into a pleasant sleep.

They had no idea that where there are cows, there is also a shepherd.



1. ‘Ma’ayan HaShavua’ (Vayikra, p. 496).

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City	Candle Lighting	Shabbat Ends	Rabbeinu Tam
New York	7:56 pm	9:03 pm	9:27 pm
Miami	7:46 pm	8:42 pm	9:16 pm
Los Angeles	7:36 pm	8:38 pm	9:07 pm
Montreal	8:10 pm	9:23 pm	9:41 pm
Toronto	8:27 pm	9:37 pm	9:57 pm
London	8:39 pm	10:07 pm	10:11 pm
Jerusalem	7:19 pm	8:10 pm	21:05 pm
Tel Aviv	7:16 pm	8:08 pm	21:02 pm
Haifa	7:17 pm	8:12 pm	21:06 pm
Be'er Sheva	7:15 pm	8:09 pm	21:02 pm

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*From the Words of*

**HaRav Yoram Abargel zt"l**

*The Days of the Omer - Preparation for  
Matan Torah*

*When one has a great degree of fear of  
heaven, they will avoid all prohibitions, they  
will adhere to Halacha, and will treat the  
Mitzvot with great reverence.*

*Yosef the righteous suffered from the terrible  
decree of being separated from his parents  
and family, yet when someone sought  
his closeness in a forbidden manner and  
complimented him - the wife of Potiphar  
- he declared "How can I do this great  
evil and sin before G-d" (Bereshit 39). She  
threatened him and pursued him, but he was  
uncompromising, he would not act against  
G-d's will.*

*As Rabbi Nachman says in Likutei Moharan  
(II 48), "this world is but a narrow bridge,  
great care must be taken when crossing it,  
and the main thing is to have no fear at all."*



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