



Parshat Bechukotai: Blessings of the Torah

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Hershel Reichman

Parshat Bechukotai begins, "If you will walk in my statutes to keep my commandments and perform them." We learn from this that there are three parts to Torah: *l'amol*, to work at it and study it; *lishmor*, to know it and protect it within ourselves through consistent review; and *v'asitem*, to practice it by actually living it. Many people suffer from a form of disconnect. They think that if they are already doing one of the three aspects of Torah then they do not need to do the rest. For instance, if they are practicing Torah, they do not need to study it, or if they are already studying, then review is unnecessary. The *yetzer hara* tries his best to throw us off. We must not give in to these incorrect rationalizations. Instead, we must work to achieve a balance between all three aspects. Then we will merit the copious blessings enumerated further in the parsha.

The Shem Mishmuel explains that these three aspects of the Torah correspond to the three parts of the human soul: *nefesh*, *ruach*, *neshama*, the biological, emotional, and intellectual levels of our soul. Practicing Torah, *v'asitem*, rectifies our *nefesh*, our physical bodies. We put tefilin on our head and arm, we eat matzah, and we sit in the sukka. Our bodies are elevated through the *mitzvot*.

Aristotle viewed the physical side of man as sordid and the soul as noble. In contrast, the

Rambam argued that man has the responsibility to turn this base side into something holy. Our physical selves are a receptacle for the Divine Image. We value life as holy. Doing good deeds with our bodies is the ultimate form of fulfilling Hashem's will.

Ruach, emotion, is the second level. This corresponds to "*Im bechukotai teleichu*," the work involved in keeping Torah. By devoting every extra moment of our time to the sacred obligation of learning Torah we emotionally invest in something precious to us. This is *tikun ha' ruach*, rectifying our emotional soul. The highest level is *yediat hatorah*, knowledge of Torah. Our knowledge of Torah remedies the flaws of our *neshama*, the highest level of soul.

There are three categories of blessings in this parsha, physical bounty, emotional peace, and Hashem's presence dwelling among us. These too correspond to the three components: *nefesh*, *ruach*, and *neshama*. If we perform mitzvot, we will merit children, life, and sustenance. If we invest our emotions in Torah, Hashem will bless us with emotional tranquility. Finally, if we know Torah, if we rectify our intellectual souls, Hashem will bless us with His presence. As we focus on the *tikun* of the three parts of the soul we achieve the purpose of our existence.

Similarly, the three parts of the soul

correspond to Shabbat, Yom Tov, and Rosh Chodesh. Yom Tov is *nefesh*. Pesach is sustenance, Shavuot is the Torah which is called life, and Sukkot is the holiday of the family.

Rosh Chodesh is the power of *ruach*. The beginning of the moon's renewal, it is the holiday of King David. King David suffered so much. He was driven away, forced to wander lost and alone, harassed and persecuted. Yet he merited to come back and to become the king of Israel. This is the power of the moon, its waxing and waning symbolizes the strength of *ruach*. Our faith and passion for Torah gives us the impetus to carry on through the travails and sufferings of exile.

Shabbat is *neshama*. It is a day of knowledge of Torah, when we come close to Hashem by studying His holy words. Our *neshama* senses the sanctity of the day as it unites with its source through the Torah.

Let us recommit ourselves to be *ameilim b'Torah*, to be passionate for Torah. Let us invest our time and effort to study His words and to practice what we've learned. In this way we will attain the ultimate blessing of *neshama* – that Hashem's presence will dwell among us.

Shavuot: Loving Our Fellow Jew

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller

The halachic definition of hatred is the opposite of the definition of love. Love is empathetic connection. It's wanting to do good for another person because you view him as yourself. Hatred is detachment and alienation. Fulfilling the commandment of rebuking one's friend is about building connection. Avoid defensiveness by speaking to the person privately, and addressing the action itself. Train yourself to focus on the present. Don't bombard the person with past mistakes. Give the offender an escape hatch. Affirm that you value their intent to correct their wrongs. See the other person as yourself and review times in your own life where you made mistakes. Think how you would have wanted others to correct you.

What if the problem is the way the person is and not what he's done? Perhaps the two of you have very different personalities. Approach every situation by thinking of how you can help the person and what you can learn from him. The Torah forbids revenge.

When a person suffers an insult, he often feels vulnerable, small, and unable to cope. The feelings are increased by the other person who may seem powerful and frightening. The sweetness of revenge is in equalizing the relationship. If you cut off his leg, he will become vulnerable too.

But life isn't about feeling small or suffering pain. Hashem puts us in different situations to uplift us. If you feel vulnerable, you can utilize

the feeling as a means to improvement. Taking revenge just belittles you and the other person. You become everything you disliked in the other person, uncompassionate, callous, and cheap. Bearing a grudge is still playing the same game. You don't get uplifted by it. A better response would be to be brave and big, and to give the other person what he really needs, without speeches or smirks. In the worst case, he could ignore the fact that he didn't help you. In the best case, he'll regret what he's done.

Ona'ah is hurting another person with words. If you strike back by making the offender feel hurt and vulnerable you become what you despise. You might feel like the victor in the short run. But in the long run, you've made

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yourself smaller. See your opponent for what he is, a person who is critical and wants control and affection. Don't let him stay big in your mind. Bring him down to your level. Even better would be to raise yourself up and move into nurture mode. The reality is that someone criticized you. Stay in the present. Don't go backward.

If he's always been that way, then move on to the next step. Hashem wants you to realize how vulnerable you really are. Your job is to ask, "Where's my *tikun*?" Either I'll be a person who benefits others or I can say, "So that's how someone feels when you criticize him," or "It's no coincidence that this person crossed my path. How can I help him and what can I learn from him?"

The responsibility to draw up a clear contract between an employee and employer is on the employer. One should not wait till the job was completed to set a price. An employer is obligated to pay his workers before nightfall. If

he doesn't have the money, he must tell his workers that their wages will be delayed. If an employer hired you knowing he doesn't have the money to pay you, you're obligated to take him to *beit din*. If you refrain from asking for your wages you are giving him inappropriate leeway. Parents are not responsible to pay for damages done by their children as kids tend to be unpredictable. However, letting a child destroy other people's property is wrong.

Lashon hara affects the speaker, the listener, and the person being spoken about. The speaker may be saying something true but there's a vast difference between his truth and the real truth. Most times it is better to avoid negative speech, but sometimes as in the case of *shidduchim*, one could be required to speak. In such cases you can say, "I don't know, but I can tell you my experience." You can express what you found negative in a positive way. In cases where the issue could affect the person in the future, a *shaila* should be asked how to deal with the matter correctly.

Lashon hara may give you momentary attention. If you talk about people it puts you in a superior position. But when you say something negative it changes the way you look at people. You lose your ability to see the world accurately. You have to be careful not just for your own sake but for the listener's sake. You usually don't have the whole picture and people tend to hear what you didn't say.

There's a *mitzvah* to love a fellow Jew. One should speak well of people. Repeating positive stories about people makes you find the grace and goodness in Hashem as His soul filters down to the human soul. Give people respect by making eye contact with them, listening attentively while they speak, and valuing what they say. They will then reveal more of their positive self to you. Another way of bonding with others is to pray for them. Still another way of connecting is noticing what people need. By becoming a giver you become a more expanded person.

The Mitzvah of Sefirat Haomer

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Ari Jacobson

The Gemara in Masechet Menachot discusses the *mitzvah* of *sefirat haomer*. The Gemara tells us that Amemer, one of the great *amoraim*, would only count days and not weeks. His rationale was that since *sefirah* is only a remembrance of the offerings, counting days is sufficient. In practice we count both days and weeks following the opinion of the students of Rav Ashi. Nonetheless, most of the Rishonim explain that Amemer's point is well taken. Although we count both days and weeks, the *mitzvah* is only a remembrance and not a Torah mandate.

The Rambam disagrees and writes explicitly that *sefirat haomer* is Torah mandated. He explains that the counting is not about remembering the omer or the *shnei halechem*. *Sefira* is a count towards receiving the Torah. Why then does the Torah express the counting in terms of the barley offering and the bread offering? Barley is considered animal fodder while wheat is human food. In Egypt we descended to the forty ninth level of impurity. When Hashem took us out he gave

us seven weeks to remove all the impurity and replace it with *tahara* (purity) and *kedusha* (holiness) until we were ready to receive the Torah. We go from the omer, which consisted of barley, and refine ourselves to the point that we're ready to offer the *shnei halechem*, baked with wheat, and to receive the Torah.

We do not make a *Shehecheyanu* on the *mitzvah* of *sefirat haomer*. The Ba'al Hameor explains that since the whole purpose of the *mitzvah* is to remember what was lost we cannot make a *Shechiyanu* on what we are lacking. How can we understand this in light of the Rambam's reason, which says we are counting towards receiving the Torah. We don't say *Shehecheyanu* because we are pained that we have to wait so many weeks to receive the Torah. Chassidut teaches something similar. We sank so low that we had to wait seven weeks to receive the Torah. That's not something to say *Shehecheyanu* about.

This is not the majority view. Tosfot cites the opinion of the Bahag that if a person forgets to

count one day he can no longer fulfill the *mitzvah*. Tosfot, and most of the Rishonim, disagree. They say each day is a separate *mitzvah*. Therefore, according to Tosfot if a person misses a few days he can still count the next day with a blessing because each day is a separate *mitzvah*. In practice, the Shulchan Aruch rules that if a person misses a day entirely he can still continue counting because maybe Tosfot is correct that each day is a separate *mitzvah*. However, the law is *safek bracha l'hakel* (when in doubt about reciting a *bracha*, you do not recite it). Since the Bahag holds that there is no *mitzvah* if you missed a day, you do not make a *bracha*.

There are many authorities who say that you can count during the day. Therefore, if you didn't count at night you must count during the following day. However, since there are significant opinions that maintain that day counting doesn't count, you should only count without a *bracha*. During the rest of *sefirah* one is allowed to continue counting with a *bracha*.