

# PARSHAS BEHAR-BECHUKOSAI

תשפ"ג

These parshiyos are filled with the fundamental ideas that form the basis of the Torah. The gemara says these parshiyos have to be read every year before Shavuos because they are vital for a proper kabbolas haTorah. It means that kabbolas haTorah is happening this Shavuos, and we need to prepare for it. We are not remembering the kabbolas HaTorah of 3500 years ago – we are reaccepting it now. The gemara in Shabbos says that one should avoid risky medical procedures before Shavuos because it is a precarious time of year – the existence of the whole world is held in abeyance until Shavuos when we agree to receive the Torah. For, if we do not accept the Torah on Shavuos, Hashem will revert the world to the state of tohu and vohu. There is no point in creating a world without Klal Yisroel accepting the Torah.

We know that there are serious consequences to the Torah – there are brochos and kholos that come with it. Brochos if we accept it and kholos if we reject it.

Parshas Behar begins with one of the most important yesodos. Klal Yisroel are about to enter their country and Hashem is distributing to each one his portion. At this time, Hashem has to remind us that we need to dedicate an entire year to recognizing that the land really belongs to Hashem and not to us.

We discussed last time that there is a concept of kedushas hazman. Shabbos comes once a week to make us refocus on ruchniyus and not get caught up in our material pursuits. There is a din of oneg and a din of mikroh kodesh – limud haTorah and tefillah as a tzibbur. The individual spends half the day in avodas Hashem and half the day enjoying. When it comes to Shemittah, Hashem gave us six years to work the field and keep the produce, but for the seventh year we have to make it all hefker – anyone can come in and take the fruits.

After 50 years, Hashem returns all the ancestral lands that belonged to the original Jews who entered Eretz Yisroel. All the land goes back to their original families. The land doesn't belong to us. We are immigrants in Hashem's world. We are His guests – it doesn't belong to us.

The Jewish slave that you bought does not belong to you. He is a fellow Jew and he has to be free to serve his real master – Hashem. You don't own your money and you don't own your possessions or your business. You are just an employee in Hashem's big, gigantic cosmic business. You don't make the rules. You can't charge whatever you want for the goods you provide. There are halachos of o'no'oh which you have to keep in order not to profit beyond a certain amount. Hashem tells you how to do business because it is Hashem's money.

Chazal made a takono that you must make a brocho before you put something in your mouth. There is a contradiction in the pesukim. One says the world belongs to Hashem. The other says Hashem gave the Earth to human beings. The resolution is that before you make a brocho, the food belongs to Hashem and you have no right to enjoy it. After you make a brocho and make a statement that it really belongs to Hashem, He gives you permission to enjoy it.

This is the correct way to approach the world. It is a very important idea that goes through all of Yiddishkeit. Our attitude to giving tzedokoh or spending money on mitzvos is the same – you aren't being generous with your own money. You were given this money to use in the way Hashem wants you to. One of the ways Hashem wants you to spend His money is to give some of it to tzedokoh. We are employees in Hashem's business and He gave us certain limited rights to property

according to His rules.

I once hired a certain faculty member to teach here and I told him what we will be learning for the upcoming zman. The first day of the zman, he starts teaching his shiur a different mesechta in a different perek. He tells me it is better to approach the sugya from this angle. Obviously, this is not the way to run a yeshiva! He works for me and he needs to follow my guidelines if he wants to teach here. The same is true with us living in Hashem's world. We are His employees in managing the world. This is the idea presented at the beginning of the parsha. 'Ki li kol ho'oretz'.

There is another idea in the parsha – every Jew is equalized by Yovel. Everyone starts over from the way things were set up from the beginning. Shemittah and Yovel are teaching us essential concepts about how to approach the world. It is not ours. We are working for Him and He allows us certain rights with the recognition that it all belongs to Him. We can only use things according to His rules. This is the backbone of all Yiddishkeit. We don't own the world and we don't run the world.

There were elections here in Israel, and the current Prime Minister got a clear majority of the votes. He thought that now he can run the country. It turns out that he can't exactly run the country the way he wants. The same is true with the President of the United States. Hashem reminds them they aren't running the world. We need to recognize continually that it is Hashem's world. All this has to be in place before we turn to Parshas Bechukosai.

The beginning of Parshas Bechukosai describes unbelievable prosperity if we follow the Torah. The Ramban writes that Hashem is absolute good and His existence automatically bestows the highest level of goodness to the world. He does not cause any destruction. But we see there is a lot of evil and destruction in our world. Where does it come from? The Rambam says there are two ways to destroy a table. You can take an axe to it and smash it directly, or you can remove a leg and the table will collapse and break apart under its own weight. If Hashem is present, there is goodness in the world, but when Hashem withdraws from the world, evil naturally comes in to cause destruction.

What determines if there is more or less of Hashem's presence in the world? Hashem set up the world in a way that we are the ones who decide – with our mitzvos and aveiros – how much of Hashem's presence is revealed, which allows Hashem's goodness to pour into the world. If we shut Hashem out of the world, then Hashem's goodness is shut out as well, and evil and destruction automatically steps in to fill the vacuum.

Rav Chaim of Volozhin compared this relationship between our actions and Hashem's presence to a person's reflection in a mirror. If the person facing the mirror raises his hand, he will see the mirror image of himself raising its hand in an exact, corresponding manner. It is up to us.

The Ramban explains that the moment Odom and Chava ate from the eitz hadaas in Gan Eden, they created a tremendous distance between Hashem and human beings, and the natural world became corrupted – and less fertile and less harmonious. In the future, when we correct the sin of Odom HoRishon at the time of Moshiach, we will reestablish the close kesher between us and Hashem, and the world will revert back to its original, harmonious state and there will be tremendous prosperity.

Which mitzvah will do the most to restore this original harmonious state of connection between Hashem and the world? It is not keeping the mitzvos and it is not simply learning Torah. It is *ameilus* in Torah, which is very different than simple learning. You invest your mental energy and struggle to figure it out. You work hard at it. But it is not an intellectual exercise. We learn in order to connect to Hashem's mind on the deepest level possible. Then nature will respond with bounty because we have brought Hashem's presence back into the world.

This process builds and builds until we can build the Beis Hamikdosh. What gives us the merit to build a Beis Hamikdosh? Some people want to do it through trying to bring *korbonos* and others think it should happen by blowing up the Mosque. These Jews know very little Torah.

In 1967, when the IDF took control over Yerushalayim and Har Habayis, some misdirected rabbis decided that when Tisha B'Av will come, we should not say 'Nachem' anymore since Har Habayis is now under Jewish control. My Rebbe came out strongly against this. We are still in mourning because we don't have the Beis Hamikdosh and the Shechinoh is in *golus*. I asked him that part of the *tefilloh* of 'Nachem' refers to Yerushalayim being under the control of foreign legions, and this doesn't seem to be true anymore. My Rebbe responded that if Chazal made a *takonoh* to say this *nusach* of the *tefilloh*, it must be they understood that things won't change until the *geuloh*. Sure enough, the political situation soon after the Six-Day War shifted against Israel and the Israeli government had to give back jurisdiction over Har Habayis to the Moslem Waqf – who are still in control till this day.

So how do we get to the point of bringing the Shechinoh back? It is not by storming Har Habayis. The *posuk* says Hashem decides when the time for the Beis Hamikdosh comes. Some *rishonim* say He brings it down from *shomayim*, and the Rambam says we build it ourselves, but all agree it comes from the *kedushoh* that we create by our Torah and mitzvos.

How did *golus* begin? By doing the opposite – by driving away the Shechinoh. How does this happen? It was by neglecting to be *omeil* in Torah. You are turning your back on the most powerful method of connecting to Hashem. Rashi is clear that this means by neglecting to toil and work hard to understand *midrashei* Chazal. Not neglecting to learn *Novi* or any other area of Torah. We cannot understand Torah *shebichtav* without Torah *shebaal peh*.

This neglect to toil in Torah sets two processes in motion. You then start to despise those who do toil in Torah. You then start to despise the *chachomim* and you start to neglect the mitzvos. Hashem responds to our rejection with all kinds of *klolos*.

In return, we respond to the *klolos* with an attitude called 'keri'. The Rambam in *Hilchos Taanis* explains what this is – when we approach things that happen in the world as something random or having a purely natural explanation. 'Keri' is when people refuse to acknowledge that Hashem runs the world and they insist that only political or economic or social forces influence human history. This is a very serious *aveiroh*. It seems that Hashem is walking away, but maybe He pulled back His protective cover because we are pushing Hashem out of the world – and by doing this, we set into motion all the forces of destruction.

The Rambam says it is a form of cruelty to try to analyze Jewish history the same way you analyze the history of every other nation. You look for natural causes and forces instead of recognizing that Hashem is pulling the strings. So not only are Klal Yisroel being punished for their original *aveiros*, they are now being punished for not recognizing that it was their own *aveiros* which caused Hashem to retreat from this world – which brings the destruction.

In the end, the punishments bring *golus* – Klal Yisroel are removed from Eretz Yisroel and are scattered among the nations because they failed to keep *Shemittah*. They failed to recognize that Hashem owns and controls the land, and they will be wandering around the world as refugees.

One day, there will be a turnaround in Jewish history and the Shechinoh will return. What brings the turnaround? We have to realize how we distanced ourselves from Hashem and how we refused to realize Hashem is causing everything to happen. When our stubbornness will finally be broken and we accept the bitter truth, Hashem will remember His *bris*.

Hashem gives a guarantee that Eretz Yisroel will not be occupied by any foreign nation while Klal Yisroel are in exile. When the Ramban came to Eretz Yisroel in the 13th century, he saw total desolation. When you read the history of the 19th century you find reports of total desolation here by Mark Twain and others. Chazal tell us it is a *brocho* – not a *kloloh*. Why? If another nation would have settled and built up the country, it would have prevented the Jews from returning. No-one lived here until we started to come back. The Palestinians had to make up a complete myth about their so-called history as a Palestinian nation that was displaced by Jewish settlement. Anyone who studied the history of the region knows that the Arabs did not live here in large numbers until the Jews started to build settlements and got the local economy off the ground. Only then did the Arabs start to pour in from surrounding Arab countries to take advantage of new economic opportunities being provided by the Jews coming from Europe. The truth is what the *posuk* says – the land remained barren in order for us to come back. Hashem took care of us even in *golus*.

We read all this before we accept the Torah on Shavuos. We declare to Hashem that the world belongs to You. We are visitors who are working in Your world. We are given rights to use the world according to the rules Hashem lays down. How we do business and how we function depends on how Hashem allows it. We have to give back the land after *Yovel* because Hashem owns all of it. This is *Parshas Behar*.

*Parshas Bechukosai* tells us something else. What is running Jewish history is the Jewish people's level of connection to Hashem. The deeper and the stronger the connection, the more blessing and bounty comes into the world. And the primary mitzvah which brings this connection and this blessing is *ameilus* in Torah.

The major serious *aveiroh* is 'keri' – to think we run the world and not Hashem. Every major political figure today thinks he runs the world, but in reality, Hashem is manipulating them as tools to bring about the results He wants. The biggest *aveiroh* is to attribute everything that happens to chance or natural forces and ignore Hashem's presence. This attitude pushes Hashem out of the world and this itself causes destruction. It makes Hashem retreat and pull back His protection from evil forces.

All of this is the *hakdomo* to *kabbolas haTorah*.

Chazal made a *takono* to read these *parshiyos* before Shavuos, which means even in communities who have a different *minhag* for *kriyas haTorah* on Shabbos and it doesn't come out as part of the normal annual Torah reading cycle, these communities have to interrupt their cycle to read these *parshiyos* before Shavuos. Because these are the basic ideas needed to accept the Torah.

We need to understand that the mitzvah which creates the deepest connection to Hashem and brings the greatest *brocho* to the world is *ameilus* in Torah. This is our job.