

**SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE****BEHUKOTAI****Haftarah: Yirmiyahu 16:19-17:14****JUNE 3-4, 2016 27 IYAR 5776****Day 35 of the Omer****Rosh Hodesh Sivan will be celebrated on Tuesday, June 7.****DEDICATIONS: In honor of the birth of Poliza Penina Bat Leah****In memory of Amalia Ben-Dayan - Emalia bat Latifeh A'H**

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**Editors Notes**

**I apologize for the delay this week. Please see the  
 two stories below and then my comments.**

**The portion of BeHukotai deals with blessings  
 and curses, cause and effect and G-d's presence  
 among us. Unfortunately that presence is often  
 hidden and we only get glimpses often through  
 strange coincidences.**

**The first story. Man's Best Friend – A Holocaust  
 Reflection comes via Daniel Keren's Shabbos  
 Stories ... via Reb Shabse Fisher who saw it in  
 "The Mishnas HaParsha" edited by Rabban  
 Gamliel Rabinowitz, shlita in the holy city of  
 Yerushalayim. Mr. Fisher personally translated  
 the story word-for-word, but forwarded to Ms.  
 Ramona Freedman of Sydney, Australia who  
 edited it and created a more natural and easier to  
 read English-language version you will find  
 below.**

We know the harsh reality. There were few survivors of the Holocaust in comparison to the millions mercilessly taken. Given this and given the advanced current age of those who witnessed it all first-hand, all testimony is precious. Every account counts! This present-day generation of children will be the last to have that direct link.

Looking through a lens of appreciation and understanding the true value of each remarkable story, in this edition we cast a spotlight on Chaim Tzvi Solomon, a Holocaust survivor who currently resides in Israel. Below, he generously shares of himself. Respect.

Chaim Tzvi originates from the Hungarian town of Holmein. Miraculously, in his possession is an ancient but beautiful Sefer Torah in mint condition, that has been protected and handed down in his family for generations. It is an exceptional and unique

Torah, written long ago by a pious and extremely gifted holy scribe.

Today, this Torah is much sought after by many rabbis and communal leaders. Like countless others, the entire extended family of Mr. Solomon perished in the horrors of Auschwitz - his parents, brothers and sisters were all exterminated. Chaim Tzvi is the sole survivor of the entire Solomon clan. However, through Divine intervention, his precious Sefer Torah (today residing in a famous synagogue in Israel), astonishingly survived the Holocaust.

And here's how:

When World War II broke out, Chaim Tzvi was a young student studying at the yeshiva of the revered Rebbe of Sekelhed. Chaim Tzvi was extremely close to his Rebbe and acquired great Torah knowledge while learning there. One day, he received a Nazi directive to immediately report to the army to be drafted to work for their (despicable) war machine. Chaim Tzvi knew ignoring this notice was not an option. With a heavy and downtrodden heart, he went to his holy Rebbe, showed him the letter and relayed his expected obligation to reply and consequently leave his studies. He solemnly requested a blessing from his Rebbe for protection against all harm.

The holy Rebbe held Chaim Tzvi's hands within his own, looked him in the eye and said, "My dearest Chaim Tzvi, promise me you will forever observe the bond between a Jew and Hashem."

When Chaim Tzvi heard his Rebbe's request he was taken aback, but immediately replied with great emotion and in a loud firm voice, "I promise I will never forget or let go of my commitment to Hashem, not even for one moment."

Upon hearing his reply, the Rebbe took his holy hands and placed them on Chaim Tzvi's head and with the greatest affection, assured him that in the merit of keeping his pledge with Hashem, he would be protected throughout the war.

Blessing in hand, young Chaim Tzvi set forth (with reserved optimism) to the call of duty. During the war years he experienced horror after horror – from labor camps to crossing perilous borders trying to escape. Somehow he managed to sustain himself throughout.

Chaim Tzvi attributed these miracles firstly to Hashem and also to the blessing of his holy Rebbe.

He focussed on committing to keep his pledge. During this period, he also was able to secure a pair of Tefillin and performed this mitzvah daily. He shared this opportunity with other Jews during those difficult times. Are there really enough adjectives to describe how profoundly challenging it was? With a sigh, we all know there are not.

In May, 1945, the war ended and although technically free from the clutches of the Nazis, Chaim Tzvi found himself dazed, alone and wandering with no particular destination. Rumors circulated that the Nazis not only annihilated his entire family but also the Jewish population of his home town. Unfortunately, the reports proved to reflect reality. And Chaim Tzvi, like so many others, was left desolate and alone in a cold, dark post-war reality.

With no expectations and an impossibly heavy heart, he decided to return to Holmeim to salvage any remnants of his pre-war life. To his utter dismay, he witnessed total destruction and devastation beyond belief. Not one Jewish soul was to be found. No one was spared the furnaces of Auschwitz. Every semblance of Jewishness was completely demolished, all burned to the ground - nothing but ashes remained.

Despondent, Chaim Tzvi sat down heavily on a slab of rock not too far from what used to be his home. Destitute and bereft, he put his head between his knees and cried uncontrollably over the calamity and catastrophic situation that had befallen him and the Jewish People.

Above all other material possessions, Chaim Tzvi was distraught over the loss of his family's cherished Sefer Torah. He ruminated ... just like everything else that had been viciously destroyed, how could such a holy artefact vanish without any trace? Surely the merits of his forefathers and their good deeds would protect it from all danger?

He had lost so much and prayed fervently. Engrossed in prayer and sobbing, from a distance he suddenly heard a loud barking sound that escalated with every minute that passed. Chaim Tzvi raised his head, looked around and saw a huge dog heading directly towards him. As it approached, he recognized the dog as his family's watchdog.

The Solomon's had been very prosperous and wealthy, and in his mind's eye he recalled the large mansion within which they all dwelt, necessitating a guard dog for protection. The dog was devoted to the Solomon family and was adored in return. An internal dialogue began, "I am not my family's only survivor, look here, our dog was also fortunate to survive the Nazi onslaught."

The evil Nazis valued the life of a dog more than that of a Jew and dogs were thus exempt from the Nazi extermination decree. Now, a dog relies on its sense of smell to interpret its world. And with this,

the dog recognized Chaim Tzvi as a Solomon family member and approached him barking loudly. However, the tone of the bark was not what Chaim Tzvi recalled. It was at a different pitch and caught his attention. The dog raised its front paws and rested them on Chaim Tzvi, all-the-while continuing this piercing howl. The dog's uncharacteristic behaviour reminded him of an incident that happened many years past.

Chaim Tzvi's father had popped out into a nearby store and briefly left his baby sister alone at home, sleeping in her crib. While unattended, the baby fell out, landed with a thud on the floor and began to scream hysterically. Obviously a dangerous situation. Hearing her distress, the family dog intuitively ran directly to the store to find the father, barking and wailing frantically. Determinedly, he jumped up onto the father with his front paws. Sensing the urgency, he ran after the dog who was bounding home. Thankfully, in the nick of time, he rescued the distressed baby.

Flash forward. Chaim Tzvi, amidst the ruins of his once beloved town, saw the dog act in a similar fashion and grasped that there must be a reason for this behavior. He stood up and the dog began running, turning its head periodically to see if Chaim Tzvi was following. The dog picked up its excited pace with Chaim Tzvi in hot pursuit until he reached a certain wheat field on the outskirts of town. Panting, the dog finally came to a halt at a specific spot.

Barking wildly, the dog began digging with his paws, hinting that there was something buried beneath, without any initial success. Seeing this, Chaim Tzvi felt compelled to help and he too began digging, finding a discarded old tool. Dogs are fondly known as Man's Best Friend and in that moment, Chaim Tzvi and his dog were unified in the search.

Before too long, they had carved out a deep crater in the ground. However, much to his chagrin, nothing was unearthed. Disheartened, Chaim Tzvi thought to himself, perhaps my war-ravaged dog is delusional? Perhaps I am? He rose to leave. Sensing this, the dog continued barking louder and resumed digging this time, even more conscientiously. Chaim Tzvi saw the urgency in the dog's actions, retraced his steps and returned to dig with revitalized energy.

After approximately 15 minutes, his digging implement hit some sort of metal object, something he presumed was impeding his efforts. He persevered and soon saw the top of a huge metal chest. After expending tremendous physical effort, he was able to hoist it up, clear off the dirt and pry open the lid. Did his eyes deceive him? Joy of joys, much to his delight, there in front of him on an open random field in war-torn Hungary, lay the family's cherished Sefer Torah, along with all the Torah ornaments neatly arranged alongside. From the core of his being

emanated an elated roar. The family's treasured Torah, longed for and pined for ... was right before his eyes. Upon seeing the chest, the dog seemed to compose itself - success.

Mystified over the back-story, Chaim Tzvi was perplexed. Who hid the Torah? What were the circumstances behind it? He stood aside almost in a reverie when suddenly, the dog went back to the same site and began digging and barking louder than before. Chaim Tzvi assumed the dog wanted him to close the large hole, this was not the case. The dog showed no sign of abating – communicating that he still wasn't satisfied.

Exhausted but determined, Chaim Tzvi lifted up the tool once again and continued digging until there was a hole approximately ten foot deep. To his amazement, he uncovered another chest similar to the first one. After much exertion, he hoisted the second chest to the surface and simultaneously, the dog's barking subsided and it lovingly rested nearby. Opening the second chest, he could not believe what he saw. It was a chest full of money, valuables and deeds, all belonging to his late father, who had cleverly managed to hide them before the cruel Nazis deported his family resulting in an ultimate death sentence. Chaim Tzvi now understood the foresight of his dear, brave father.

Pre-war, the loyal family dog was accustomed to accompany his master to the outskirts of town and was there the day these treasures were hidden. Impressively, after surviving the war, it remained faithful and waited until a family member returned home, assuming the role of being their guide.

Amazing! Extraordinary! Remarkable!

Chaim Tzvi approached the few remaining town neighbors and asked if any light could be shed on the (tragic) story of his parents. It was relayed to him that several days after being deported, together with all Jews in Holmeim, his father was abrasively dragged back to his house surrounded by Nazi generals. Apparently, they were informed of his status as one of the wealthiest Jews in Hungary. An interrogation ensued with suspicions his wealth was hidden nearby. This was denied. He stated that upon sensing troubling times ahead, he had chosen to send his entire fortune to other countries. The brutal Nazis did not believe him and brutally bludgeoned him with clubs until he bled profusely.

Hearing the deafening commotion and screaming, the family dog appeared and attacked the cursed Nazis, biting and tearing at them. The Germans (known to be skilled at handling dogs), attempted to calm the dog but to no avail. Enraged, they resolved to shoot the dog, but it fled, all-the-while dodging bullets.

So a canine companion survived the war to accomplish a mission.

How wondrous are the ways of Hashem!

Several days after this life-changing discovery, the dog died. Having completed its life's duty, this loyal four-legged friend allowed Chaim Tzvi to recover the precious Sefer Torah, together with the valuables. Through the unbearable pain of the war that decimated so many, this gesture enabled one Jewish man, Chaim Tzvi, to get back on his feet. Of course, the emotional scars are carried for a lifetime.

A short while after the war, Chaim Tzvi immigrated to Israel, piecing his life back together and proudly raised a beautiful family. Today, he is surrounded by loving family members - his family Sefer Torah is safe, secure and in demand. It is an honour and a privilege for all who hold this precious parchment in their hands.

Throughout his long life, just as the holy pre-war Rebbe of Sekelhed asked, Chaim Tzvi always observed that profound bond between himself and Hashem.

And as for the dog ... Man's Best Friend? Yes, indeed

**The second article is plucked from the news and is by Rabbi Benjamin Blech who has been a Professor of Talmud at Yeshiva University since 1966, and was the Rabbi of Young Israel of Oceanside for 37 years. This article is titled, Killing Harambe: The Cincinnati Zoo Tragedy - It was a choice between a human life and an animal life.**

There's no way to put it other than to call it a tragedy. It would be wrong to say it was a story with a happy ending. True, a child's life was saved – but at a terrible and profoundly sad price. And the aftermath of what happened this weekend at the Cincinnati zoo offers a fascinating insight into an ethical dilemma which is causing considerable controversy.

On Saturday afternoon a little four year old boy snuck away from his parents and somehow managed to fall into the enclosure for several gorillas. One of them, a 17-year-old gorilla named Harambe, picked up the child, at first seemingly protectively, but then in a manner which appeared increasingly dangerous and potentially life-threatening. Harambe was a member of an endangered gorilla species. He had done nothing wrong. He deserved neither punishment nor death. Yet a human life was at stake and the zookeepers needed to make an immediate decision. A tranquilizing dart would have taken too long to take effect.

The Dangerous Animal Response Team concluded they had no alternative. They shot Harambe and saved the boy. And that opened the floodgates to an outpouring not only of grief but of anger, of blame, and of outrage.

More than 185,000 respondents on the zoo's Facebook page as well as the change.org website condemned the parents for their lax supervision which allowed the little boy to crawl through the opening to the gorillas. But there was an even larger contingent of petitioners who expressed their fury at the zoo keepers for the action they took. They claimed, as the Washington Post headlined, "Shooting an endangered species is worse than murder."

As the story spread, the blame game intensified. Guilt was assigned to the little boy, to his parents or to the zookeepers in varying measure. But what was most striking to my mind was the remarkable consensus of a great number of respondents that killing Harambe was an act of homicide – and in a stunningly ironic twist the parents of the little boy continue to receive numerous death threats for their part, albeit unintentional, in the gorilla's death.

Watching a video of the event, there is room to question whether Harambe hovered over the little boy to protect him or to harm him. What is clear though is that he dragged the boy through the water by an ankle before grabbing the back of his clothing. Jack Hanna, one of the most renowned animal experts in the world and Director Emeritus of the Columbus Zoo and Aquarium, said he agreed "1000 percent with the decision to kill the animal. I have a home three miles from where the mountain gorillas live in Rwanda. Watch that gorilla's response. He doesn't know what is going on. And this is a silver back, not a female. He is alarmed. Yes, he goes to look at the little child. What happens when you tranquilize the animal? I've done research in the wild. I have seen what happens, I know what happens. When that dart hits the animal and you can imagine, it is like a shot, but he jumps. What if he had a hold of that little boy. I have seen a silver back gorilla take a green coconut and crush it – beyond the strength of anything you know. So it's a choice between a human life and an animal life."

That of course is the bottom line. A decision had to be made on the spur of the moment. Perhaps the best way to frame the question is to ask what would you have done if it were your child? It was a choice – between a human life and an animal life.

And what is most troubling is that for far too many people today the answer is not obvious nor even politically correct.

I share with animal rights groups their concern for protecting animals from cruel mistreatment, unnecessary pain, and heartless abuse. These are all Torah ideals. When Abraham's servant Eliezer looked for a bride for Isaac he was most impressed by Rebecca's efforts to ensure that the thirst of his camels was a priority as much as his own. When the rabbis wonder why Moses was chosen to be the leader of the Jewish people they point to a midrash which explains that as a shepherd Moses demonstrated his empathy for the suffering of others by carrying a hurt lamb on his shoulders to a stream of water to enable it to drink. "Because you care so much even for the needs of an endangered lamb," God responded, "you are worthy of becoming the shepherd of the Jewish people." The reason for shechitah – the biblically commanded way of killing an animal before it is made permissible for consumption is because it is the quickest and most painless method.

Judaism demands that we feed our animals before we feed ourselves – so as not to inflict emotional pain on them by forcing them to watch us eating without knowing during that time that their meal will shortly follow.

But animals are not human beings. Animals have life – but they were not created in the image of God. To equate man and beast is serious mistake not because it too greatly elevates the latter but because it too unreasonably diminishes the former.

"Murder" is a word which is inapplicable to the killing of an animal. The Bible teaches us that "He who sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed – because in the image of God He made man" (Genesis 9:6). The severity of the crime of murder is rooted in human godliness. It is not a false sense of superiority which accounts for the need to respect human life above that of all others. It is the most fundamental teaching of the Torah that human beings carry within them the spark of divinity which imbues them with both the blessings as well as the responsibilities of their uniqueness.

Animal lives deserve respect. Human lives demand reverence. When a choice needs to be made between them, the decision is clear and unequivocal. We may surely be saddened by Harambe's death but we must be consoled by the recognition that it guaranteed the survival of a child created in the image of his Creator.

**What scares me is that the Nazis were known to value animals over Humans. With our new extreme views of social justice, our society is treading on those same dangerous waters. Stating that killing an animal is worse than**

murder has to send shivers down our spines. The rabbis tell us that during the time preceding the flood, people married their animals in ceremonies with legal documents. Ramban warned us 800 years ago that when our moral values decline, they will eventually decline to where we see nothing wrong in marrying an animal. I believe that if we continue on the path we are on this will certainly come about if not in our lifetimes then certainly in our children's. This week a documentary about the Nonhuman Rights Project entitled, **Unlocking the Cage** from HBO/Pennebaker Hegedus (academy award winner and nonminee) Films is premiering at the Film Forum in New York, before being released nationally.

**What is The Nonhuman Rights Project (NhRP).** According to Wikipedia is an American animal rights nonprofit organization seeking to change the legal status of at least some nonhuman animals from that of property to that of persons.... The NhRP works largely through state-by-state litigation in what it determines to be the most appropriate common law jurisdictions and bases its arguments on existing scientific evidence concerning self-awareness and autonomy in nonhuman animals. Its sustained strategic litigation campaign has been developed primarily by a team of attorneys, legal experts, and volunteer law students who have conducted extensive research into relevant legal precedents.[1] The NhRP ... (has expanded into) Switzerland, Argentina, England, Spain, Portugal, and Australia.

Although the Torah clearly forbids – Tza'ar ba'alei chayim (literally means: "the suffering of living creatures") and is the Jewish principle which bans inflicting unnecessary pain on animals. This concept is defined by the Talmud as being a Biblical mandate. It is linked to the Biblical law requiring people to assist in unloading burdens from animals, seeking to change the legal status of animals to that of persons, means that society is already sliding down that slippery slope which Ramban envisioned, and dragging us down with them.

Animals may be nice and sweet and man's best friend, but they are not people.

Shabbat Shalom,

David Bibi

## Summary of the Parasha

Parashat Behukotai discusses the rewards that Hashem will give us if we follow the mitsvot and the punishment if we don't. And I was thinking when I punish my son or make my son do something why do I do it? Why do I make him go to sleep at a normal hour? Why do I make him go to school? Why do I make him eat dinner and not let him have too much junk? Why do I make him use his free time to read? Why do I tell him if he doesn't do these things he won't get treats and special things and even threaten him with punishment? All these things are for his benefit. I want him to go to sleep early so he learns well in school. I want him to eat food so he is healthy and strong.... It's all for his own benefit. And the punishments I threaten him with are just to motivate him to do what at the end will make his life better. So too is our relationship with Hashem. The Torah in Parashat Behukotai lists a myriad of curses that will come about if we don't do the mitsvot. And they are really scary and horrible curses. Why? Why is Hashem, who loves us, threatening to do all these horrible things to us? Maybe in the context of what we said above we can explain that all the mitsvot are things that Hashem knows will make our life better (even if we, with our limited human brain capacity, can't understand how wearing sisit or learning gemara will make our life better). And the punishments are just a way for our loving father to motivate us to do them so we don't miss out on the great benefits that will result from doing them. And when we don't do the mitsvot, just like the child who runs in the street or doesn't pay attention in school, we are only hurting ourselves. By our children, their foolishness is clear. They just don't trust that we know better than them. But for some reason when it comes to us it is not so clear. Why aren't we able to internalize that Hashem knows better because he is all-knowing and we are limited. In sum, the mitsvot are there to make our lives better. And the punishments of this week's parasha are our loving father motivating us and guiding us in a direction that will allow us to experience a great life.

### Behukotai - Blessings for those who do and curses for those who don't keep the mitsvot

- 1- The berachot for keeping Hashem's mitsvot - parnasa
- 2- The berachot for keeping Hashem's mitsvot-peace, proo oorvoo, a renewed covenant
- 3- The curses if we do not keep Hashem's mitsvot - 45 curses
- 4- Items pledged to the Beit Hamikdash - one who pledges the value of a person, one who pledges an animal

- 5- Items pledged to the Beit Hamikdash - one who pledges a field he inherited
- 6- Items pledged to the Beit Hamikdash - one who pledges a field he bought, consecrating property
- 7- Maaser by fruit and by animals, maaser sheni

#### FROM THE JERSEY SHORE NEWSLETTER

**“Even when they will be in the land of their enemies I will not reject them to destroy them.” (Vayikra 22:46)**

Our perashah begins with the idyllic blessings that await the Jewish People if they live up to their covenant with Hashem, and are worthy of Hashem's esteem. If the Jewish People fail to live up to their obligations as the Chosen People, they will fall from the blessed state promised to them to become the victims of the horrendous punishments described later in the perashah. These are meant not as revenge, but to influence the people to repent.

Rav Simha Wasserman (as told by Rabbi Ephraim Nisennhbaum) recalled a cover story of Look Magazine in the 1950's regarding "The Vanishing American Jew." The article predicted the disappearance of the American Jewish community by the end of the century.

Thirty years later, Rav Wasserman pointed out, Look Magazine had vanished. But the Orthodox Jewish community's strength in number, visibility, and even political clout had grown noticeably. The Torah promises that regardless of the numerous challenges of exile, the Jewish People will continue to survive. Rabbi Reuven Semah

**“If you behave casually with me” (Vayikra 26:21)**

When describing the decline of the Jewish Nation after they sinned and were exiled from their land, the Torah uses the word *chazak* a few times, which means coincidence. Whenever the Jewish people say that the punishment which befalls them is only a natural occurrence, a coincidence, Hashem has to resort to stronger methods in order to show us that He is the cause of everything. Just like a father first chastises his son with a slight tap, and if there is no response has to resort to stronger methods, so too Hashem, who is our Father, "talks to us" and wants us to get the message before it becomes harsher. Whenever we hear of tragedies in our community, fighting in the land of Israel or other calamities, we must realize it is not natural, it is a message. Each one must take the message to heart and apply it based on his or her own way of life, to try to improve and find favor in the eyes of Hashem. Even when we see the weather drop 40 degrees in one day, or the stock market go up (hopefully) or down many

hundreds of points from day to day, these are happenings meant to show us that there is no natural occurrence which doesn't have a Creator masterminding His plan. Let's keep our eyes open! Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

#### RABBI ELI MANSOUR

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[MishnaBerura.com](http://MishnaBerura.com), [LearnTorah.com](http://LearnTorah.com)  
Torah and Peace

Parashat Behukotai begins by describing the rewards that God promises to grant Am Yisrael if they observe the Torah. Rashi famously comments that that these rewards depend on not only the observance of the Mitzvot, but also intensive Torah study. When the Torah says at the beginning of this Parasha, "Im Be'hukotai Telechu" (literally, "If you follow My statutes"), it actually refers to "Amelut Be'Torah" – "toiling" in Torah learning.

In describing the rewards that God promises, the Torah first mentions material success and prosperity, and then says, "Ve'natati Shalom Ba'aretz" – "I shall make peace in the land" (26:6). One of the rewards for our devotion to Torah study – and the most important of all rewards – is that of "Shalom," peace.

Indeed, peace is one of the natural results of serious Torah learning. One of the effects that Torah has on a person is rearranging his priorities and redirecting his focus. When a person delves into Torah, he comes out with a changed perspective on life. Issues and concerns that trouble most people seem trivial and unimportant. With his mind focused on lofty, intricate concepts, he does not afford too much significance to relatively minor issues such as honor and prestige. The result of this perspective is "Shalom" – serenity and contentment.

Consider the example of a businessman who is enjoying a busy day at his store. He is working feverishly, without stopping for a moment, to deal with every customer, realizing that each is another profit. The man continues for hours, his mind focused on the money he is earning, and these thoughts drive him to work non-stop and pay no attention to anything else. If somebody would stick his head into the store while this is going on, and call the storeowner a bad name to insult him, would he care? Would he pay any heed to an insult when he is busy with his store, making a fortune of money? Would this person's offensive comments have any effect on him at all?

Similarly – and all the more so – Torah changes a person's perspective and attitude, thereby preventing

him from becoming agitated by minor trivialities. When we learn Torah, we are collecting "valuables" whose worth far exceeds the profits of even the most successful businessman. We are filling not our pockets, but our souls, with the sacred wisdom of Torah. When we are preoccupied with this pursuit, few things are capable of upsetting us. Whether we receive the honor we think we deserve, whether we are invited to the upcoming function, whether we get that extra bonus, whether our neighbor is friendly to us – these issues do not weigh all that heavily on the mind of somebody rigorously pursuing Torah scholarship.

And this is why devotion to Torah learning brings us the reward of "I shall make peace in the land." Simply put, a person who learns Torah is less likely to fight with others, because he is less likely to care about the things people generally fight about. Torah study ensures that our minds remain focused on far more important, loftier matters, thus absolving us from the need to fret over trivialities. And the result is a peaceful existence and harmonious relations with the people around us.

**VICTOR BIBI  
SOD HAPARASHA**

**Will be distributed under a separate list  
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**Rabbi Wein  
MACHERS**

Because of the constantly creeping overreach of government into all areas of our lives, a new industry was created here in Israel – and certainly not only in Israel but in every other country and political system in the world. Here in Israel, people who are engaged full time in this industry are called "machers." Loosely translated from the original Yiddish, the word connotes people who are doers and able to accomplish specific goals and tasks.

In the Western world they are usually called lobbyists or, in a more derogatory fashion, influence peddlers. They are the people who know how to swim in the confusing tides of bureaucracy and who deal with governmental laws that always have unintended consequences. Usually the machers owe their success, in accomplishing the goals of their clients, to people whom they know who are working for the government in the overall bureaucratic system.

As a lawyer in Chicago's municipal court system eons ago, I learned that many times it was more

important to be in the good graces of the lonely appointments clerk than attempting to become a favorite of the judge himself. Because of the maze of laws and regulations that govern every facet of our existence, here in Israel it is very hard to really get any major issue settled or that necessary permit or letter without resorting in one way or another to the services of a macher. Someone has to be able to help the poor ignorant frazzled citizen steer through the maze that he or she will encounter when having to deal with the government.

Machers are not "fixers." They do not do anything that is illegal or corrupt. They are merely expeditors who know the ins and outs of a complicated society and its government. They have the patience and the expertise to deal with this cumbersome system until it produces positive results for the macher and his or her client.

Depending on the circumstances, the macher may or may not charge for the services rendered. Always lurking in the background is the understanding that somehow a quid pro quo situation will arise. But it is usually never expressed in explicit terms and the dangerous shoals of bribery and corruption are expertly avoided.

It is my experience and impression that machers enjoy their work. The thrill of the chase is oftentimes more rewarding than the actual accomplishment itself. The same is true for those who use this profession to raise funds for organizations and institutions. Only those who somehow viscerally enjoy the chase and the adventure of the challenge are the ones who are truly successful in this most difficult line of work.

The secret always lies in the ability of the macher to successfully manipulate others to do his or her will – to grant the appointment, to waive the fee, to expedite the granting of the proper permit - all of which is legal but encrusted in the quagmire of governmental inefficiency and bureaucracy.

It is my own learned observation, arrived at after nineteen years of living here permanently, that almost everyone in Israel is at the very least a macher of one type or another. Everyone knows someone who somehow can ease the path towards accomplishing the goal of dealing with the government. Even though we have a population of over eight million souls, we are still a small country made up of families and neighborhoods. As such, everyone really does know someone who can be of aid and assistance in times of need and challenge.

Sometimes the macher is too overeager or overzealous in assistance. Do-gooders can oftentimes do more harm than good with their well-meaning intent and actions. Nevertheless, most of us find comfort and aid in the efforts of others to help us when we are in difficult and trying circumstances. Human nature, like physical nature itself, abhors a vacuum. No one wishes to be left alone to have to face the problems that life inevitably imposes upon us regularly. So there will always be room for machers of all types and stripes.

In every election campaign here in Israel the politicians and candidates for office rail against the macherim and the way they play the system. However, since it is they who are responsible for the system and the necessary accompanying presence of the macher, their protests ring somewhat hollow. I imagine that the macher has been a permanent fixture in society from time immemorial. So I imagine that he or she will remain so in the future as well.

#### **Chief Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks A Sense of Direction**

Smartphones can do amazing things – few more amazing than Waze, the Israeli-designed satellite navigation system acquired by Google in 2013. But there is one thing even Waze cannot do. It can tell you how to get there, but it cannot tell you where to go. That is something you must decide.

The most important decision we can make in life is to choose where we want eventually to be. Without a sense of destiny and destination, our lives will be directionless. If we don't know where we want to go, we will never get there no matter how fast we travel. Yet despite this, there are people who spend months planning a holiday, but not even a day planning a life. They simply let it happen.

That is what our parsha is about, applied to a nation, not an individual. God, through Moses, set out the stark choice. "If you follow my statutes and carefully obey my commands, I will send you rain in its season and the ground will yield its crops and the trees their fruit ... I will grant peace in the land, and you will lie down and no one will make you afraid."

If, on the other hand, "You do not listen to me, and do not keep all these commands..." then disaster will follow. The curses set out here at length are among the most frightening of all biblical texts – a portrait of national catastrophe, bleak and devastating.

The entire passage, both the blessings and the curses, can be read supernaturally or naturally. Read

the first way, Israel's fate, at least in biblical times, was a direct result of its faithfulness or lack of it to the Torah. God was constantly intervening miraculously in history to reward the good and punish the bad. Every drought and famine, every bad harvest or military defeat, was the result of sin. Every peaceful and productive year was the result of obedience to God. That is how Israel's prophets understood history.

But there is also a more naturalistic reading, which says that Divine providence works through us, internally rather than externally. If you are the Israelites in the land of Israel, you will always be surrounded by empires and enemies bigger and stronger than you are. You will always be vulnerable to the hazards of rainfall and drought because Israel, unlike the Nile Delta or the Tigris-Euphrates valley, has no natural, reliable, predictable supply of water. You will always, therefore, find yourself looking up to the heavens. Even quite secular Jews often understand this – most famously David Ben Gurion when he said, "In Israel, in order to be a realist you have to believe in miracles."

On this reading, the way of life set out in the Torah is unique in ways that are natural rather than supernatural. It is indeed the word of God, but not God as a perpetual strategic intervener in history, but rather, God as guide as to how to live in such a way as to be blessed. The Torah is a set of instructions for life issued by the Designer of life. That is what the sages meant when they said that at the beginning of time, "God looked into the Torah and created the world." Living according to the Torah means, on this view, aligning yourself with the forces that make for human flourishing, especially if you are a tiny people surrounded by enemies.

What was unique about the society envisaged by the Torah is that in it every individual mattered. Justice was to be paramount. The rich could not buy special treatment and the poor were not left destitute. When it came to communal celebrations, everyone – especially the orphan, the widow, the stranger – was to be included.

Everyone had at least some share in the harvest of grain and fruit. Employers were to treat employees with fairness and sensitivity. Even though there were still slaves, one day in seven they would enjoy the same freedom as their owners. This meant that everyone had a stake in society. Therefore they would defend it with their lives. The Israelites were not an army conscripted by a ruler for the purpose of his own self-aggrandisement. That is why they were capable of defeating armies and nations many times



their size.

Above all, they were to have a sense of destiny and destination. That is the meaning of the keyword that runs like a refrain through the curses: *keri*, a word that appears seven times in our parsha and nowhere else in Tanakh. "If you walk with Me with *keri* ... then I will walk with you with *keri*."

There are many interpretations of this word. Targum Onkelos reads it as "hard-heartedly", Saadia as "rebelliously", Rashi as "treating as a casual concern." Others understood it as "harshly", or "with hostility". Maimonides, however (partially echoed by Rashi, Rashbam, Ibn Ezra, Chizkuni and others), understands it as related to the word *mikreh*, meaning "chance". Hence the meaning of the passage according to Maimonides is: "If you believe that what happens to you is simply a matter of chance, then, says God, I will leave you to chance."

On this reading, the book of Vayikra ends as it began, with the fateful choice between *mikra* (with an aleph) and *mikreh* (with a heh): between seeing life as a call, a summons, a vocation, a destiny, and seeing it an accident, a random happening with no ultimate meaning whatsoever.

So it is in the life of nations and individuals. If you see what happens to you as mere chance, your fate will be governed by mere chance. That is what the sages meant when they said, "Wherever [the Torah] says, 'And it came to pass', it is always a prelude to tragedy." If you simply let things come to pass, you will find yourself exposed to the vagaries of fortune and the whims of others. But if you believe you are here for a purpose, your life will take on the directedness of that purpose. Your energies will be focused. A sense of mission will give you strength. You will do remarkable things.

That was the special insight Jews brought to the world. They did not believe – as people did in ancient times and as atheists do today – that the universe is governed by mere chance. Was it mere chance that a random fluctuation in the quantum field produced the Big Bang that brought the universe into being? Or that the universe just happened to be regulated by precisely the six mathematical constants necessary for it to give rise to stars and planets and the chemical elements essential for the emergence of life? Was it mere chance that life did in fact emerge from inanimate matter? Or that among the hundred million life forms that have existed on earth, just one, *Homo sapiens*, was capable of asking the question "Why?"

There is nothing self-contradictory about such a view. It is compatible with all the science we now know, perhaps with all the science we will ever know. That is the universe as *keri*. Many people think this way. They always did. On this view, there is no "Why," not for nations, and not for individuals. Life just happens. We are here by accident.

Jews believed otherwise. No one said it better than the Catholic historian Paul Johnson:

No people has ever insisted more firmly than the Jews that history has a purpose and humanity a destiny. At a very early stage in their collective existence they believed they had detected a divine scheme for the human race, of which their own society was to be a pilot. They worked out their role in immense detail. They clung to it with heroic persistence in the face of savage suffering. Many of them believe it still. Others transmuted it into Promethean endeavours to raise our condition by purely human means. The Jewish vision became the prototype for many similar grand designs for humanity, both divine and man-made. The Jews therefore stand right at the centre of the perennial attempt to give human life the dignity of a purpose.

The people who change the world are those who believe that life has a purpose, a direction, a destiny. They know where they want to go and what they want to achieve. In the case of Judaism that purpose is clear: to show what it is to create a small clearing in the desert of humanity where freedom and order coexist, where justice prevails, the weak are cared for and those in need are given help, where we have the humility to attribute our successes to God and our failures to ourselves, where we cherish life as the gift of God and do all we can to make it holy. In other words: precisely the opposite of the violence and brutality that is today being perpetrated by some religious extremists in the name of God.

To achieve this, though, we have to have a sense of collective purpose. That is the choice that Moses, speaking in the name of God, set before the Israelites. *Mikra* or *mikreh*? Does life just happen? Or is it a call from God to create moments of moral and spiritual beauty that redeem our humanity from the ruthless pursuit of power? "To give human life the dignity of a purpose." That is what Jews are called on to show the world.

**AS HEARD FROM RABBI AVIGDOR MILLER Z'TL  
"If you shall walk in My statutes and you shall  
guard My commandments". (26:3)**

Included in this verse is also the Study of the Torah (Sifra). Actually, "the study of the Torah is as (important as) all of them" (Peah 1:1).

"The Holy One blessed is He may forgive Israel for idolatry, immorality and bloodshed; but He does not forgive them for rejecting the (study of) Torah" (Yerushalmi Hagigah 1:7).

Hashem does not forgive without repentance, for "one that says that He forgives, his life is forfeited" (Baba Kama 50A); and therefore only with proper repentance does Hashem forgive the three grave sins.

But the rejecting of the Torah-study, even when repentance is made therefore, is not forgiven.

"And you shall learn them" (Devarim 5:1).  
"And you shall teach them diligently to your sons and you shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk on the road and when you lie down and when you rise up" (Devarim 6:7).  
The Tefilin and Mezuzot are commanded as reminders of the duty of Torah-study (ibid.6:8-9).

Even when all the laws are observed yet the Torah-study is neglected, these portents of retribution are foretold.

In actuality, the decline in Torah-study always brings with it a breakdown in everything else.

"Guard My commandments" means: to study them constantly, like guarding money.  
Quoted from "A Kingdom of Cohanim" by Rabbi Avigdor Miller ZT'L

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