

**SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE**

BEHAR-BEHUKOTAI

Haftarah: Yirmiyahu 16:19 - 17:14

MAY 15-16, 2015 27 IYAR 5775

DAY 42 OF THE OMER

Rosh Hodesh Sivan will be celebrated on Tuesday, May 19.

DEDICATIONS: in memory of Sam Zalta - In memory of Sylvia Ash

This Shabbat We welcome Rabbi Dr. Meyer Abittan, Rabbi Asher Abittan and Rabbi Avraham BenHaim

Friends – We need assistance and a commitment for Friday nights –

At your request, we will begin at 7PM and we will strive to complete services before 8PM

Candle lighting at 7:46 p.m. Mincha at 7:00, Shir HaShirim 6:45

SHABBAT: Morning Perasha Class with Rav Aharon at 8:00

SHAHARIT at 8:30AM – Shema this week 8:26

The Torah Reading Will Not begin before 9:45AM and The Amidah for Musaf not before 10:30AM

"The Kiddush is sponsored by Jack and Patti Azizo in honor of their daughter Lilly's  
Birthday, today May 16."Please sponsor a Kiddush or Seudah Shelishi or breakfast in memory or in honor of a loved one.  
Our weekly Kiddush will be subject to sponsorship. We would love to see the sponsorship board filled.

Dairy Kiddush sponsorship will be \$300, \$400 for Deluxe and \$ 500 for Super Deluxe

Meat Kiddush sponsorship will be \$400, \$600 for Deluxe and \$1000 for Super Deluxe

Seuda Shelishi at \$100 for the class each week. And Sunday and weekday breakfasts are \$100 ea

Shabbat Morning Children's Program 10:30 - 11:30 with Jennifer

Ages 2-5 - in the Playroom/

Girls Ages 6-12 - In the Upstairs Library / Treats, Games, Stories, Prayers and Fun!

Children's afternoon program with the Bach at Sephardic April and May at 5:00 PM

Ladies Class at the Lembergers at 5:30

Class with Rav Aharon 6:45 PM - Mincha 7:15 PM

Seudah Shelish at 7:45 PM with Rabbi Abittan ( Meyer or Asher)

Birkat haMazon 8:25PM - Arbit at 8:30 PM - Shabbat Ends at 8:46

DAILY MINYAN – Sunday followed by breakfast and class 8:00AM

Monday , Thursday 6:55, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday at 7:00AM

Sunday evening – Mincha and Arbit at 7:45 PM

**This year Shavuot coincides with Memorial Day Weekend - May 23rd, 24th and 25th****We have Shabbat and then Shavuot begins Saturday night, Sunday and Monday****Tikun LeI Shavuot - 11:30PM on Saturday night, Shaharit 4:40AM on Sunday, Amidah at 5:30:57****We have a commitment for this minyan****The main Minyan would be pushed to 9:15AM on Sunday  
and hopefully led by Naim Zemirot Yisrael – Uri Lemberger .....****REMEMBER EVERYONE SHOULD JOIN ON SHAVUOT****TO HEAR THE TEN COMMANDMENTS AS WE DID ON HAR SINAI 3500 YEARS AGO****We are planning an ice cream bar after services and then hopefully a trip to Mrs. Wagner for some delicacies.****We need a commitment from at least ten guys for this minyan****Please let us know**

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**Daily Minyan Mon – Thurs at 979 Third Avenue,  
 17th Floor, Artistic Frame at 4PM – Please join us!  
 212-289-2100 – Mincha– The most important  
 tefilah of the day –Give us 11 minutes and we'll  
 give you the World To Come!**

### Editors Notes

Some time ago I was sitting with a woman in her nineties and she was telling me about her life and how she was thankful for all her blessings. She voiced one major complaint saying that when she would eventually pass, the thought that none of her friends would be at her funeral saddened her as they had either all passed on or would probably be to infirm to attend. I learned that this is a worry that weighs on many octogenarians and nonagenarians.

On Sunday morning I attended a funeral of a man who was three weeks shy of his 101<sup>st</sup> birthday. There synagogue was filled. There was standing room only around the perimeter and there were even people up in the balcony. And it dawned on me that although this man no longer had contemporaries, every person in that Synagogue felt that they were attending the funeral of a dear friend.

Mr. Sam Zalta was my friend too. With Mr. Zalta, there was no generation gap. He connected with young and old. His deep and thunderous greeting of, "How ya doing, Pal"? will forever resonate in my ear. His signature farewell and blessing (as was common to those of his generation), Ul-lah Maak ( G-d be with you) remains with me.

Our reading this week begins by telling us of the laws of the Sabbatical Year given to Moses at the Mountain. The Rabbis ask why are we specifically told that this commandment was given at Har Sinai? One answer is that from here we learn that all the commandments in general accompanied by their specifics were given by Hashem to Moses on the mountain. On a Homiletic level we can suggest something deeper. The highlight of history is the revelation at Sinai. At no point before or after were the people more connected with G-d. This connection is something we long for always. How can one achieve this Sinai like experience in one's own life? Perhaps the answer lies in the Sabbatical year. Leaving one's fields, suspending one's pursuit of livelihood and sustenance and trusting that G-d will fulfill his promise and provide is the ultimate level of faith. Think about what strength it takes to do that! We are all tied to corporal things and the most

physical of things is land, real estate, tangible property. Perhaps Moses is telling us that to separate from that, to trust in Hashem and in nothing else lifts us to the point where we feel as we did at Mount Sinai.

This simple and complete faith is something we all saw in the earlier generations. Mr. Sam Zalta was one of our links to that generation and one saw within him this special faith binding him to Heaven. One saw it in the blessings he bestowed, in the smile he shared, in the greetings he offered and in his book of Psalms which he completed daily, each reading a strand of Mr. Zalta's spiritual cable to the Al-mighty. His faith allowed him to remind us always and to truly believe that nothing is impossible.

I knew Mr. Zalta for my entire life. I grew up friends with his son Carlos or Charlie who remains my friend to this day. When we prayed in the youth minyan at Ahi Ezer with Rabbi Mevorach, it was Mr. Zalta who made sure we had Flying Saucers and Lala Paloozas – ice cream from Carvel. When we got a little rowdy and some of the older men would yell at us, it was Mr. Zalta who defended us. He treated all of us as his own children.

My father would tell me stories of Mr. Zalta and his dad Mr. Moussa Zalta who took upon himself the responsibility of greeting the immigrants from Syria who arrived into New York. He made it his job to show them a friendly and recognizable face and them find them a place to stay so that no one would find themselves helpless or homeless.

The fruit never falls far from the tree.

When I began working and spent hundreds of days on the road each year, I often spoke with Mr. Zalta when calling Whiz Travel. "How ya doing pal" and "Ul-lah Maak" began and ended the hundreds of brief conversations we had. When I was stranded somewhere because of a ticketing issues, flight cancellations, airline overbooking or simply arriving too late, rather than speak with an airline customer service desk, it was a phone call to Whiz that I knew could help. "Don't worry Pal, we'll get you home, just hold on for a second while I'll get Carlos." His reassuring tone always helped lift some of the natural anxiety one faces when they hear, "sorry, you can't get there from here today". And sure enough, no matter the assurance and promise, his blessing was truly a blessing and his children always found a way to fulfill that promise and get us there from here! Thousands of you out there shared the same experience and undoubtedly the same memories.

On a more personal level, Mr. Zalta was definitely my number one newsletter fan. His children and grandchildren told me how he would read each issue four or five times, how he took the papers with him to bed and how he pressed them to find out if the new issue arrived. Often when I really didn't want to prepare anything, it was the thought of Mr. Zalta's disappointment that motivated me. We never write for 20,000 or even 500. We write for people and Mr. Zalta was one of those faces I could always envision as my fingers crossed the keyboard.

On Sunday we attended a funeral. Strange as it sounds, it was the happiest funeral I ever attended. It was a celebration of life and legacy. We mourn our loss of this special man. We hope in his memory to take his life lessons and incorporate them into our own lives. We hope to remember to greet all with a kind face, to love and reach out to others. We pray to remember that our faces are in the public domain and we have no right to frown, but owe the world a smile. And finally to connect to him and those of that special generation recalling Ul-lah Maak, Hashem is with us and nothing is impossible.

Mr. Zalta, thanks for reminding us that nothing is impossible, A part of me believes that you'll figure out a way to get them to distribute copies of the newsletter in heaven, if you can and they do and you're reading this now, please say hello to dad! Nothing is impossible.

Shabbat Shalom, David

**PS: Everyone in the community is aware of the good that Ahi Ezer does through its senior citizen housing and meals on wheels programs. Ahi Ezer is in the process of seeking approval from the New York State Department of Health to add Assisted Living Program (ALP) beds to our community. Ahi Ezer needs your help. Please see the attached letter and send a version of it in support of the effort. Thanks**

**PSS: So why no results in the World Jewish Congress Elections? Here is what we were told: *The 2015 elections to the World Zionist Congress is the first US Zionist election in which the process of creating a registration list and then voting was merged into one. Because the Area Elections Committee (whose job it is to determine and carry out the rules, regulations and procedures for the elections) decided to merge the registration and elections, the removal of duplicates has to now be done following the election.***

***On May 7 the AEC voted not to decrypt and calculate the results until it is satisfied that there is a valid list of voters. This was complicated by concerns about potentially questionable registration practices (for example: mass entry of registrations by list activists; credit card abuse). The Area Election Committee voted to create an independent panel (Election Commission) to review issues and complaints.***

***The target date for the AEC to hear from the commission is May 27. Once the AEC is ready to accept the voter registry as valid there will be remaining issues and challenges; however these can be adjudicated after we have election results. Our goal is to have results by early June.***

#### **Summary of The Weekly Torah Reading by NATHAN I DWECK**

##### **Behar - Holiness regarding land (shmita and yovel)**

- 1- The issur of working the land on the years of shmita and yovel
- 2- Honesty in business, buying and selling land in regards to yovel, don't harrass your fellow
- 3- The reward for keeping shmita, the issur of selling land permanently
- 4- Buying back the land of a relative who sold due to poverty
- 5- Buying back land. Preventing poverty by lending one who needs help. The obligation to lend w/o interest.
- 6- Laws regarding one who owns a jewish slave or a non-jewish slave
- 7- A Jew who sells himself to a non-Jew. The obligation to redeem him

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

- 1- The berachot for keeping Hashem's mitzvot - parnasa
- 2- The berachot for keeping Hashem's mitzvot- peace, proo oorvoo, a renewed covenant
- 3- The curses if we do not keep Hashem's mitzvot - 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

## EXCERPTS FROM THE JERSEY SHORE TORAH BULLETIN

**“If you will say, ‘What will we eat in the seventh year?’...I will ordain My blessing for you in the sixth year.”(Vayikra 25:20-21)**

This year is the year of Shemithah, and our perashah, Behar, begins with the misvah of Shemithah. Shemithah is the misvah that in the land of Israel the land is rested and not planted or harvested for one year every seven years. Rabbi Ovadiah Yosef zt"l asks, why does the Torah promise a blessing of the sixth year to provide three years of harvest only after one asks what will we eat if we don't work the land? Why can't the blessing come without asking?

He answers that there are people who serve Hashem whole-heartedly without questioning what will be. As the pasuk says, “Tamim tihyeh im Hashem Elokecha – be wholesome with Hashem.” So even when it comes to the misvah of Shemithah, they observe it without worry or question, that Hashem will provide for them each and every day.

As a result of this attitude Hashem will provide for them in a hidden manner, so that the sixth year will look like any other year. However, when they take grain out of their storehouses the grain will not finish. Hashem will place a blessing in the storehouse and never finish despite the fact that they take over and over again. This blessing will carry them for three years, the sixth, seventh, and eighth. The great benefit of this is that they won't have to work so hard to harvest three years' worth of grain in one year. They won't have to build additional storage to store the extra grain.

However, there are others that are unable to trust on Hashem completely and therefore they ask, “What will we eat?” They will not feel secure until they see the abundance with their own eyes. Therefore Hashem will give them a highly visible blessing. However, there is a down side to this. Due to the huge blessing they have to work hard to gather it, plus they have to provide storage. Since their trust is not perfect the blessing will be according to their level.

May Hashem grant us blessings, living in the land of Israel for all of us, Amen. Shabbat Shalom, Rabbi Reuven Semah

**“In this Yobel year, you shall return each man to his ancestral heritage” (Vayikra 25:13)**

The Jubilee year, the Yobel, came every 50 years of the Jewish calendar. Besides having the same status as Shemittah, the Sabbatical year, where no one may plant or plow, there was also an additional law that all lands and fields and houses

must return to their original owner. As the Torah puts it, when one sells a field, it is basically a long-term lease until the year of the Yobel. The Rabbis tell us that the Yobel year must have been an amazing sight, to see everyone moving from property to property. Imagine the turmoil, the frenzy and the tumult! The lesson is to teach us that we are only strangers in the land; we are not here for good. Although this law is not applicable today, the concept is just as relevant as before. We tend to think of ourselves as permanent inhabitants of this world. We build and plan to live as if this is the final stop. Yobel should teach us that we are only guests here, hopefully for our full 120 years, but guests nonetheless. With this in mind, we can plan correctly for the final destination by making our time count with Torah and misvot. Shabbat Shalom. Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

### PROOF POSITIVE

“I will ordain My blessing for you in the sixth year and it will yield a crop sufficient for three years.” (Vayikra 25:21)

After being dragged to the event by his friend who had just started to study in Aish Hatorah, Jay found himself sitting in an Aish Hatorah Discovery Seminar listening to the Rabbi give a very convincing and rational lecture on “The proofs of G-d's existence.” Throughout the seminar, Jay argued with the Rabbi, but each time Jay was forced to submit to the Rabbi's convincing arguments.

One of the final deliveries in the seminar proving that G-d gave the Torah and that it was not written by man is found in the verse quoted above. The Rabbi translated the verse and asked the following question. “If G-d was not the One who wrote the Torah, and rather it was indeed a mere mortal who had written it – he was obviously driven by the goal of convincing people to live by his ‘religion.’ If so, why would he write this verse? Why would he ever allow himself to be tested like this, to be held up to such scrutiny? To promise that everyone who keep the Shemithah Sabbatical year will be blessed with three years' worth of crop is nothing short of a miracle, a promise that a mere mortal could never hope to deliver, and would therefore never risk promising in the first place. If it was not G-d who wrote this line, how long do you think that such a religion would realistically last before being exposed as a fraud?”

Jay's friend put up his hand. “Six years,” he shouted.

“Correct,” said the Rabbi. “Yet Judaism is the oldest religion in the world with a Torah that has been followed for thousands of years. Surely if the Torah was written by a man – even an absolute

genius, we would have proved it wrong long ago?" the Rabbi concluded.

The room was stunned. After hearing different approaches to show that G-d created the world and had written the Torah, no one had anything left to say – they were all simply amazed. Everyone apart from Jay, that is. He stood up and declared with a triumphant voice, "Rabbi, thank you for presenting us with all of this today. Throughout your presentations you satisfactorily answered every one of my questions, and I could not answer back. In fact, as time went on I became convinced that you were right. Maybe I should enroll in a yeshivah to find out more, I started to think. But then I stopped myself, because I have one last argument that I know you won't be able to disprove," he said, pausing dramatically. "You see, after hearing your evidence, I agree that man could not have written the Torah, or created the world with everything in it, or sustain its existence today. But maybe it was aliens?" he said in all seriousness, looking around the room for support.

The Rabbi was slightly taken aback, but with a big smile on his face he immediately answered, "You know, you're right. I can't categorically disprove that. But I will tell you one thing. If a group of aliens came and created the world, if they created everything in it from my eye with its millions of sensory nerve cells to the highest mountains, if they can maintain the distance of the earth from the sun at exactly the right amount that it should not freeze or burn up, and if they come and write a Torah that guarantees a blessing to anyone who keeps the Shemithah, and then they tell me to keep Shabbat...then I'm gonna keep Shabbat!"

Jay was stunned. He sat down, thought about it for a few moments and then said, "Ok. Where do I sign up for yeshivah?" (Short Vort)

### **RABBI ELI MANSOUR The Torah's Concept of "Freedom"**

In the beginning of the Parashat Behar, we read of the Misva of "Yobel," the jubilee year. Every fifty years during the times of the Bet Hamikdash, a number of special laws took effect. Agricultural activity was forbidden (just like during the year of Shemita), purchased property returned to its original owner, and Jewish servants were released. The Torah sanctioned a system of indentured servitude – "Ebed Ibrî" – whereby a person who was poor or could not repay stolen funds could "sell" himself as a servant. On the Yobel year, all servants had to be set free and released from their master's home.

In presenting this law, the Torah writes, "each of you shall return to his family" (25:10). The Torah places

particular emphasis on the fact that the newly-freed servant shall "return to his family." Rather than simply stating that he leaves his master, the Torah found it necessary to stress that he must return home, to his wife and children.

This emphasis underscores the fundamental difference between the Torah's concept of "freedom" and the notion of "freedom" that is prevalent in today's society. In the world around us, "freedom" is understood to mean the absence of restraints and limitations, the ability to act as one pleases without restriction. People today think that being "free" means being able to indulge freely and act unrestrained on their instincts and impulses, without being bound to any structure or system.

From the Torah's perspective, however, "freedom" means returning to one's family, to the structured environment and commitments of Jewish family life. A person who is "free" is able to fulfill his obligations to his wife, children and parents as mandated by the Torah. For us, "freedom" means not the ability to do what one wants to do, but rather ability to do what one must do.

The Sages famously commented, "There is no one who is free other than someone who involves himself in Torah." The freedom to act on impulse is not freedom – it is subjugation, being enslaved to one's desires and passions. A person who is truly "free" enjoys the freedom to control his instincts and the lead a life of virtue and sanctity. Rather than being controlled by his evil inclination, he has the power to rise above his impulses and follow the path of Torah and Misvot.

Therefore, the Torah stresses that when a master releases his servant, the servant goes to his family, to a life of meaning and fulfillment. If he would leave to a life of lawlessness and the endless pursuit of vain pleasures, then he would simply leave from one state of subjugation to another. Instead, he is freed of his obligations to his master so that he could return to his obligations to his family, and to his obligations to his Creator.

### **Rabbi Wein Toil in Torah**

The book of Vayikra concludes this week with the Torah reading of Bechukotai. It presents rather stark choices to us. Blessings and disasters are described and it is apparently our behavior, actions and lifestyles – all of which are within our range of life choices – that will determine our individual fate and national future. It appears to be an all or nothing scenario with the Torah providing us with little or no

wiggle room. And since the stakes are so high and the consequences of failure are so dire, the challenge before us is doubly daunting and even frightening.

Yet, the Torah also assures us that the Jewish people as an entity, if not all individual Jews, will somehow survive and yet prosper in the end and inherit all the blessings described in this week's Torah reading. The Jewish people will experience many defeats in the long history of civilization, in its relationship to the non-Jewish world. But none of these defeats will be of a permanent and eternal nature.

Somehow the seeming victor and conqueror will itself become vanquished while the Jewish people will continue to show resilience and fortitude. After several millennia of history and all types of human and national events, it is difficult to view the Jewish story in any other light. So, the true message that shines forth from this week's Torah reading is that of the eternal strength of the Jewish people. Not only have they survived all of the disasters outlined in this Torah reading but they have the uncanny ability to eventually triumph and succeed, no matter how great the odds against them are.

Rashi emphasizes the requirement to "toil in Torah" as being the interpretation of the first verse in Bechukotai. Toiling in Torah has many subtleties associated with it, aside from its simple meaning of hard and consistent study. In its broadest sense one can say that the Jew that toils, in no matter what field he or she is toiling, must always do so by associating one's endeavors with Torah values and behavior.

The commandment is not merely restricted to the Talmudic scholars of Israel but is a commandment to be observed by every Jew, no matter what line of work or profession one is engaged in. The life and survival of the Jew and of the Jewish people as a whole is dependent on the presence of Torah values, lifestyle and behavior in all aspects of human society. Toil, in the spiritual sense, is not restricted only to the study hall or to the scholar.

The rabbis have taught us, based on the biblical verse, that humans are born to toil; fortunate is the person whose toil is in Torah. Again, in its narrow interpretation this refers to the scholar and student of Torah. But, also again, in its broadest sense it refers to a person who is able to experience and appreciate Torah life and values, no matter his work or profession. A person that feels that the Torah accompanies him everywhere will always be reckoned among those that toil in, with and for the Torah

### Chief Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks The Politics of Responsibility

The 26th chapter of Vayikra sets out with stunning clarity the terms of Jewish life under the covenant. On the one hand, there is an idyllic picture of the blessing of divine favour. If Israel follows God's decrees and keeps His commands, there will be rain, the earth will yield its fruit, there will be peace, the people will flourish, they will have children, and the Divine presence will be in their midst. God will make them free. "I broke the bars of your yoke and enabled you to walk with heads held high."

The other side of the equation, though, is terrifying: the curses that will befall the nation should the Israelites fail to honour their mission as a holy nation:

"But if you will not listen to me and carry out all these commands ... I will bring upon you sudden terror, wasting diseases and fever that will destroy your sight and drain away your life. You will plant seed in vain, because your enemies will eat it ... If after all this you will not listen to me, I will punish you for your sins seven times over. I will break down your stubborn pride and make the sky above you like iron and the ground beneath you like bronze ... I will turn your cities into ruins and lay waste your sanctuaries, and I will take no delight in the pleasing aroma of your offerings. I will lay waste the land, so that your enemies who live there will be appalled ... As for those of you who are left, I will make their hearts so fearful in the lands of their enemies that the sound of a windblown leaf will put them to flight. They will run as though fleeing from the sword, and they will fall, even though no one is pursuing them. (Lev. 26: 14-36)

Read in its entirety, this passage is more like Holocaust literature than anything else. The repeated phrases – "If after all this . . . If despite this . . . If despite everything" – come like hammer-blows of fate. It is a passage shattering in its impact, all the more so since so much of it came true at various times in Jewish history. Yet the curses end with the most profound promise of ultimate consolation. Despite everything God will not break His covenant with the Jewish people. Collectively they will be eternal. They may suffer, but they will never be destroyed. They will undergo exile but eventually they will return.

Stated with the utmost drama, this is the logic of covenant. Unlike other conceptions of history or politics, covenant sees nothing inevitable or even natural about the fate of a people. Israel will not follow the usual laws of the rise and fall of

civilizations. The Jewish people were not to see their national existence in terms of cosmology, written into the structure of the universe, immutable and fixed for all time, as did the ancient Mesopotamians and Egyptians. Nor were they to see their history as cyclical, a matter of growth and decline. Instead, it would be utterly dependent on moral considerations. If Israel stayed true to its mission, it would flourish. If it drifted from its vocation, it would suffer defeat after defeat.

Only one other nation in history has consistently seen its fate in similar terms, namely the United States. The influence of the Hebrew Bible on American history – carried by the Pilgrim Fathers and reiterated in presidential rhetoric ever since – was decisive. Here is how one writer described the faith of Abraham Lincoln:

We are a nation formed by a covenant, by dedication to a set of principles and by an exchange of promises to uphold and advance certain commitments among ourselves and throughout the world. Those principles and commitments are the core of American identity, the soul of the body politic. They make the American nation unique, and uniquely valuable, among and to the other nations. But the other side of the conception contains a warning very like the warnings spoken by the prophets to Israel: if we fail in our promises to each other, and lose the principles of the covenant, then we lose everything, for they are we.[1]

Covenantal politics is moral politics, driving an elemental connection between the fate of a nation and its vocation. This is statehood as a matter not of power but of ethical responsibility.

One might have thought that this kind of politics robbed a nation of its freedom. Spinoza argued just this. "This, then, was the object of the ceremonial law," he wrote, "that men should do nothing of their own free will, but should always act under external authority, and should continually confess by their actions and thoughts that they were not their own masters." [2] However, in this respect, Spinoza was wrong. Covenant theology is emphatically a politics of liberty.

What is happening in Vayikra 26 is an application to a nation as a whole of the proposition God spelled out to individuals at the beginning of human history:

Then the Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it." (Gen. 4:6-7)

The choice – God is saying – is in your hands. You are free to do what you choose. But actions have consequences. You cannot overeat and take no exercise, and at the same time stay healthy. You cannot act selfishly and win the respect of other people. You cannot allow injustices to prevail and sustain a cohesive society. You cannot let rulers use power for their own ends without destroying the basis of a free and gracious social order. There is nothing mystical about these ideas. They are eminently intelligible. But they are also, and inescapably, moral.

I brought you from slavery to freedom – says God – and I empower you to be free. But I cannot and will not abandon you. I will not intervene in your choices, but I will instruct you on what choices you ought to make. I will teach you the constitution of liberty.

The first and most important principle is this: A nation cannot worship itself and survive. Sooner or later, power will corrupt those who wield it. If fortune favours it and it grows rich, it will become self-indulgent and eventually decadent. Its citizens will no longer have the courage to fight for their liberty, and it will fall to another, more Spartan power.

If there are gross inequalities, the people will lack a sense of the common good. If government is high-handed and non-accountable, it will fail to command the loyalty of the people. None of this takes away your freedom. It is simply the landscape within which freedom is to be exercised. You may choose this way or that, but not all paths lead to the same destination.

To stay free, a nation must worship something greater than itself, nothing less than God, together with the belief that all human beings are created in His image. Self-worship on a national scale leads to totalitarianism and the extinction of liberty. It took the loss of more than 100 million lives in the twentieth century to remind us of this truth.

In the face of suffering and loss, there are two fundamentally different questions an individual or nation can ask, and they lead to quite different outcomes. The first is, "What did I, or we, do wrong?" The second is, "Who did this to us?" It is not an exaggeration to say that this is the fundamental choice governing the destinies of people.

The latter leads inescapably to what is today known as the victim culture. It locates the source of evil outside oneself. Someone else is to blame. It is not I or we who are at fault, but some external cause. The

attraction of this logic can be overpowering. It generates sympathy. It calls for, and often evokes, compassion. It is, however, deeply destructive. It leads people to see themselves as objects, not subjects. They are done to, not doers; passive, not active. The results are anger, resentment, rage and a burning sense of injustice. None of these, however, ever leads to freedom, since by its very logic this mindset abdicates responsibility for the current circumstances in which one finds oneself. Blaming others is the suicide of liberty.

Blaming oneself, by contrast, is difficult. It means living with constant self-criticism. It is not a route to peace of mind. Yet it is profoundly empowering. It implies that, precisely because we accept responsibility for the bad things that have happened, we also have the ability to chart a different course in the future. Within the terms set by covenant, the outcome depends on us. That is the logical geography of hope, and it rests on the choice Moses was later to define in these words:

This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live. (Deut. 30: 19)

One of the most profound contribution Torah made to the civilization of the West is this: that the destiny of nations lies not in the externalities of wealth or power, fate or circumstance, but in moral responsibility: the responsibility for creating and sustaining a society that honours the image of God within each of its citizens, rich and poor, powerful or powerless alike.

The politics of responsibility is not easy. The curses of Vayikra 26 are the very reverse of comforting. Yet the profound consolations with which they end are not accidental, nor are they wishful thinking. They are testimony to the power of the human spirit when summoned to the highest vocation. A nation that sees itself as responsible for the evils that befall it, is also a nation that has an inextinguishable power of recovery and return.

[1] John Schaar, Legitimacy and the Modern State, 291.

[2] Spinoza, Theologico-Political Treatise, ch. 5.

**AS HEARD FROM RABBI AVIGDOR MILLER Z'TL**  
**“If you walk with me by chance and you will not be willing to listen to me, I will add to you (retribution) seven times upon your sins” (26:21)**

“If I bring troubles upon you for punishment, and you consider them as mere accidents, I will again send you some of these ‘accidents’ as you call them, but of a more serious and troublesome character.” Why is

the punishment for this attitude seven times as much as the punishment for the sin itself? The answer is that the sin of disbelief is seven times worse than any other sin. Therefore, when misfortune comes, we are expected to understand it as a message from Hashem. But when it is explained as a result of chance, this constitutes a very grave iniquity. Thus, the awareness that Hashem conducts all the affairs of the world is even more important than the fulfillment of the Mitzvot.

This is the same as saying “Idolatry is most severe, for all who deny idolatry are considered as accepting the entire Torah” (Nedarim 25A). To attribute misfortune to chance is an idolatrous attitude, because any cause that is credited with power other than Hashem constitutes idolatry. Hashem indeed utilizes the causes, but they are His agents. When men credit the causes but do not think of the Master of the causes, they are thereby guilty of idolatry. Atheism is therefore the very worst idolatry.

According to this interpretation of ‘Keri’ (“by chance”), what is intended when Hashem declares that because of this attitude “I too shall walk with you by ‘Keri’” (26:24)? This is explained to mean that Hashem shall cause misfortunes to come in a manner that would seem as if He no longer supervised the affairs of His people and that He allowed chaos and random disorder to take charge.

But since the verse states “I too shall walk with you by ‘Keri’ “ it thereby implies that He continues to manage our affairs, and He merely creates the impression that they are chaotic accidents. This is the ‘Hester Panim’ (“concealing His face”) which is elsewhere mentioned. (Devarim 31:18). Quoted from “A Kingdom of Cohanim” by Rabbi Miller ZT'L

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