



Parshas Bechukosai

For the week ending 24 Iyar 5757
30 & 31 May 1997

Overview

The Torah promises prosperity for the *Bnei Yisrael* if they will follow Hashem's commandments. However, if they fail to live up to the responsibility of being the Chosen People, then chilling punishments will result. The Torah details the harsh historical process that will fall upon them when Divine protection is removed. These punishments, whose purpose is to bring *Yisrael* to repent, will be in seven stages, each more severe than the last. *Sefer Vayikra*, The Book of Leviticus, concludes with a detailed description of *Erachin* – the process by which someone can make a vow to give to the *Beis Hamikdash* the equivalent monetary value of a person, an animal, or property.

Insights

MOUSTERPIECE

“And I will give your rain in its time...” (26:4)

Once there was a tailor. He was known far and wide as an artist who could take mere thread and turn it into apparel fit for a king.

One day, a wealthy businessman came to him with a special job. While traveling in the East, he had given a king's ransom to buy a bolt of pure Cathay silk — the finest of its kind in the world. The tailor's eyes lit up. Never had he seen such fabric. He measured the businessman and a price was struck for the work.

The very next morning, the tailor set to work with relish. He worked with extra-special care, trying not waste a single thread.

A week of finger-breaking work followed. It was about two in the morning when the tailor stitched the last button onto the suit. He bit off the thread between his teeth and sat back to admire his work. Here was a suit the likes of which had never been seen!

He yawned, picked up his tired bones and made his way to bed. The businessman would be coming bright and early the following day to collect his suit. The tailor left the room and closed the door. Then, unable to resist, he turned and opened the door again for a final peek. There it was in all its glory, bathed in a shaft of moonlight.

He closed the door with a soft click. Silence. And then the sound of rustling. Two little dark eyes squinted out from a crack in the wall. A furry nose twitched from side to side expectantly, and a tiny mouse suddenly scuttled into the center of the room. She was followed by another, and another and another. Scores of mice came pouring out, all with a single objective — the suit. It was all over in ten minutes. All that was left were a few pieces of cloth with tell-tale teeth marks.

When the tailor came down the next morning and saw what had happened, he was distraught beyond words. He stood in the middle of his workroom with tears welling up in his eyes and sighed in resignation.

Looking up, he saw the business man standing over him, beaming with expectation and blissfully unaware of what had happened to his priceless Cathay silk.

With measured tones, the tailor told him how he had worked so hard on his suit; how it was a creation unmatched in all his years of tailoring; of the long loving hours he had devoted to it; and finally, what had happened last night after he had left the workroom.

“But” continued the tailor “I would like you to pay me what we originally agreed, because even though you don't have the suit, I did put my heart and soul into making it.” The businessman's face turned green. “It's enough I don't sue you for the price of my Cathay silk! You bungling oaf!” And with that, he stormed out of the house.

There is no job in the world which pays for effort alone. Even if you put your heart and soul into your work; if you produce nothing, that's what you get paid. Nothing.

With one exception — learning Torah. If a person really tries, and puts his heart and soul into his learning, he receives reward, even he ends up understanding nothing.

Even if he comes away with just a few tattered pieces of material where others have stitched a suit.

Prepared by Ohr Somayach in Jerusalem, Israel

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Parshas **Bechukosai** — 24 Iyar 5757, 30 & 31 May 1997

Production Design: Lev Seltzer

WIN/WIN

“If you will walk in My statutes, and My commandments you will keep and perform them, then I will provide your rains in their time, and the land will give its produce... you will eat your bread to satiation and you will dwell securely in your land.” (26:3-5)

Wealth is like the sun. It causes two opposite effects. It whitens the laundry and blackens the face of the launderer. It all depends on the receiver.

The same is true of wealth. It causes two opposite effects. It is a crown to one person and a fool's cap to another. It all depends on the mentality of the receiver.

The fool stumbles in his riches and he forfeits both materially and spiritually. He wastes his money on frippery, creating for himself a millstone of unnecessary conspicuous consumption.

The wise man, on the other hand, uses the happiness and tranquillity that his wealth affords him to spend time on perfecting his character.

It is for this reason that the Torah spells out at such great length the material benefits, the contentment and the success, that comes from keeping the *mitzvos*. These material blessings are not an end in themselves; rather the intelligent soul should employ them as a means to seek out and to arrive at a knowledge of God.

The Torah constantly assures us of the tremendous physical and material benefits that will accrue from observing its statutes and ordinances. However, this level of physical repose we have never achieved as a people or as individuals, not even during the time of the two *Batei Mikdash* (Holy Temples).

Nevertheless, that promise still exists, and when we adhere to the Holy Torah we will experience these blessings in their totality.

ANYTHING GOES

“...so as not to perform My commandments, so that you annul My covenant.” (26:15)

The reason the Jewish People wanted to annul the covenant with G-d was so they could permit themselves to commit open immorality. As the Talmud says (*Sanhedrin* 63b) “Yisrael knew that idol worship is without substance, and they only worshipped idols in order to permit themselves public immorality.”

It's implicit from this statement that if the Jewish People had only wanted to embrace *private* immorality, they would never have worshipped idols. So the question arises: Why didn't they just commit their immorality privately, and not worship idols?

Also what was the overpowering desire for *public* immorality? What was so strong about the attraction of public immorality that they worshipped idols knowing them to be no more than a child's doll?

The answer is that if they had been immoral only in private, the mere fact of their discretion would indicate that they knew they were doing something wrong, something shameful. And this, necessarily, would have led them to subconscious guilt feelings.

So, in order to prevent these guilt feelings, they wanted to be *publicly* licentious, to demonstrate that there was nothing wrong in what they were doing. However, this, in turn, would lead to their being reproved by their fellows. They would then think twice about what they were doing. This would bring them to repent, or at least to feel guilty subconsciously, which would take away all the 'fun' of being immoral.

So, in order to prevent this, they embraced idol worship, so that they could make a *philosophy* and a *culture* of immorality. A culture which said that it's not only acceptable to be immoral but people could even publish books and appear on the media as pundits of this 'New Morality.' "It's not being dominated by your baser instincts. It's liberating yourself." Thus they could immunize themselves from their feelings of guilt.

Interestingly, one can see from this both the greatness and the pettiness of Man. His pettiness, from the fact that in order to secure the fulfillment of his fleshly desires and to banish his subconscious guilt he is prepared to embrace idol worship even though he knows deep down that it's a joke.

His greatness is revealed, because even though he may be a bad person who is quite prepared to indulge in immorality; nevertheless, he is still sensitive to his own feelings of guilt when he sins in private. He knows that if he hears honest rebuke he may well forsake his ways and return.

Haftorah: Yirmiyahu 16:19-17:4

To be 'a Jeremiah' is to be a prophet of doom. For Yirmiyahu was the archetypal harbinger of destruction.

In this week's *Parsha* the Torah enumerates the blessings for keeping Hashem's *mitzvos*, and the dire warnings of what will transpire if they are neglected. Similarly, in the Haftorah, Yirmiyahu warns of what will happen if the Jewish People continue in their idolatrous ways, lacking faith in Hashem and blindly placing total faith in man.

Yirmiyahu's words echo down the corridors of history.

'He who thinks that Berlin is Jerusalem... there will come a thunder and violent wind which will uproot him from his source.' These words, written by Rabbi Meir Simcha Hakohen of Dvinsk, the '*Ohr Somayach*,' at the end of the last century, are an uncanny prediction of the storm which was to engulf Europe not many years later.

From the moment of Hashem's irreversible covenant with Avraham, the survival of the Jewish People becomes a natural imperative, no less than the rising of the sun or the flowing and ebbing of the tides.

Anti-Semitism is a force placed into nature. Its sole purpose is to prevent the Jewish People from disappearing into the melting pot of the nations, and 'annulling' the irreversible covenant with Avraham.

Assimilation is like a nuclear chain reaction. When a certain *critical mass* is reached, then the atom bomb of anti-Semitism explodes.

The word in Hebrew for 'holy' is *kadosh*, which means 'separate.' The essence of holiness is the separation of that which is holy from that which is not.

When the Jewish People forget that their purpose is to be a holy nation, separated from the other nations, then the non-Jewish world turns around and reminds them of their purpose.

Sources:

Mousterpiece - Chafetz Chaim
Win/Win - Rabeinu Bachya
Anything Goes - Chidushei HaLev

Fatherly Advice - tidbits from the Ethics of the Fathers traditionally studied on summer Sabbaths

“Whoever finds favor with people surely finds favor with Hashem.”

Rabbi Chanina ben Dossa

This concept of “Vox Populi Vox Dei,” says Tosefos Yom Tov, has a source in the words of Hashem to the Prophet Yechezkel: “I shall place my spirit amongst you.” (Yechezkel 36:27) The spirit of the people is a reflection of the spirit of their Creator.

But, he points out, you don't have to please everyone. Rabbi Chanina did not insist on finding favor with all of the people. This is why Megillas Esther concludes by informing us that Mordechai found favor with “most of his brothers,” but not with all of them.

Tiferes Yisrael

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