

## Behar-Bechukotai: The Source of All Blessing

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Dear Friends,

This double-parasha, Behar-Bechukotai, concludes the book of Vayikra.

Parashat Behar describes the laws of Shmitta, the Sabbatical rest on the seventh year, and the Jubilee, a unique Sabbatical on the fiftieth year. Parashat Bechukotai details the blessings bestowed on those following God's statutes, and curses that will befall those who don't.

It is unknown which statutes are the source of blessing, so if you are looking for a conclusive directive, you won't find it here. Most people naturally assume that this is a reference to the 613 mitzvot. Perhaps.

Being that this parasha concludes the book of Vayikra, perhaps the statutes to be followed are those described throughout Vayikra: laws of purity and impurity, the offering of sacrifices, diseases of the skin, "Love thy neighbor", and "Do not stand idly by your neighbor's blood."

I would like to suggest that it is neither. Given that we just concluded reading about the laws of Shmitta (the 7th year) and Yovel (the 50<sup>th</sup> year), perhaps these are the statutes that will reward us with the much-desired blessings.

There is a strong hint given in the order of the curses in the parasha to the relationship between Shmitta, blessings and curses: The list of curses begins with the mildest, and becomes progressively more severe until the final curse, exile from the Land.

If nothing shakes us out of our lethargy and causes us to return to the prescribed path, the final stage of our inevitable downfall will be exile. In other words, if we don't let the land lay fallow every seven years, exile will do it for us!

"Then [when you are exiled] shall the land make up for its sabbath years throughout the time that it is desolate and you are in the land of your enemies; then shall the land rest and make up for its Sabbath years... that it did not observe ...while you were dwelling upon it." (Vayikra 26:34-35)

But why? Why is observance of Shmitta and Jubilee the key to blessings? And why would lack of observance exile us?

Rashi wonders too, when he asks why is Shmitta mentioned in reference to "Behar" (Mount Sinai): "What has Shmitta to do with Har Sinai"?

Let's define what we are looking for: we are seeking nothing less than the source of

blessing!

The Sabbatical year occurs every seventh year, just as the Sabbath day occurs on the seventh day. Remember, the Sabbath is a statute originating from Creation.

In the second verse of Lekha Dodi - in honor of the Sabbath queen - we sing "Come let us go towards Shabbat, **because it is the source of blessing.**" So there it is! Shabbat, then, is the source of blessing.

But why is Shabbat (and any Sabbatical) the source of blessing? What is the abundance that flows from it? Why does observing it take precedence over so many other commandments, such as don't murder, don't steal, don't commit adultery, and even "Love thy neighbor as thyself"?

The most obvious reason is that rest is very important! There are experts who claim that the crime rate would plunge if everyone got a full night's sleep. We all know how stressed and depleted we feel when we don't get enough rest.

But let's dig deeper.

Everything in our world - all that IS - comes from the Einsof and returns to it. All abundance is born out of the realm of endless potential. When we draw money from an ATM machine, we can only tap into EXISTING funds in our account. The Sabbath as the source of blessing, suggest that we can "withdraw", or cause to materialize from the realms of Einsof - infinite potential.

There is another term used for the Sabbath besides "the source of blessing". We utter it in the Sabbath prayers: "me'ein habrachot", i.e. the Sabbath is the water spring from which all blessings are drawn, suggesting that blessings come from a source of living water. The word "Bracha" in Hebrew - blessing - comes from the same letters of the word "Breicha", a pool of water.

The Sabbath is not a mere technicality to be observed, but rather a state of consciousness. It is our INACTION, our ABSTENTION, which draw from the Spring of Living Water. Our actions may be blessings, but they are NOT the SOURCE of blessing, not the Spring from which the the living water nurtures the world. Mistakenly viewing ourselves as the source of blessing, is an act of extreme reduction of what can be actualized in the world.

The Gemarrah relates the following:

The people turned to king David, saying: "**Israel your people require sustenance! He said to them: Let them go out and make a living one from the other** [i.e., commerce]. **They said to him: A handful cannot satisfy a lion** [i.e., we don't have enough to support one another], **nor can a pit be filled up with its own clods.**" (Brachot 3B)

There are two explanations for the very last sentence: The first is that a well cannot fill up from the rainwater that flows into it; it requires deep groundwater as well. The second – Rashi's explanation – is that a pit cannot be filled only with the sand that has been removed from it. Try it sometime! Dig a hole, and then fill it up with the same dirt you removed from it. You will find that indeed, somehow more dirt will be required to flatten the surface again.

The Torah makes it very clear that God is the source of blessing, and that when we think that we are the source, the channels of blessing and abundance close and only curses are left. It happens time and time again: when we start from scratch we are humble. But then we grow abundant and stronger. Then we forget the days of humility. Instead, we become haughty and proud of OUR achievements. “We did it!”, we proclaim. “I did it MY way”, we sing. That’s when the arteries of life begin to clog up, and worries and fear start to plague us. That is the time for Shmitta, even Jubilee: to let it all go, and remind ourselves that everything that exists comes from the Einsof.

Does this sound hard to believe? When is the last time you REALLY tried it?

True, we dig wells. True, we labor hard to build channels for water to flow and water our fields. True, we sow and we reap. But we are not the source of the blessing, nor the source of the living water, nor are we the source of life within each and every grain that we sow.

Farewell, Vayikra, and thank you for your gifts. Welcome back, Bamidbar, and thank you for the gifts yet to come.

Shabbat Shalom,

Elisha