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## **Shabbat Behar / Bechukotai**

**שבת פ' בהר / בחקתי - פרקי אבות - פרק ה'**

**Sat. 15 - 16 May 2020 - 22nd of Iyyar, 5780**

**- כ"ב באייר תש"פ**

**Issue Number 952**

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## **THE SYNAGOGUE IS CLOSED UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE**

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**Shahrit Sunday to Friday on ZOOM at 07:30**

**Please call Ghassan to join the service, tachanun from Sunday**

**Daf Hayomi with Rabbi Asher Sebbag on ZOOM**

**Sunday to Thursday at 18:00, Friday at 17:00**

**Please call Ghassan or David to join the Shiur**

Shabbat Candles.	20:29
Latest Shema GRA.	09:01
Sunset.	20:48
Arbit Motzei Shabbat.	21:52
Next Friday: Candles. <b>Shabbat. Bamidbar</b>	20:38

### **What's More Valuable Than Money?**

**Behar / Bechukotai** 5780 (Leviticus 25:1-26:2)

May 11, 2020 | by [Rabbi Yitzchak Zweig](#)

**GOOD MORNING!** Simply stated, the COVID-19 virus continues to wreak havoc on the world, particularly here in the United States. As of last week, 270,000 succumbed to the disease worldwide, while the U.S. suffered about 75,000 deaths. That is 2.5 times more than the next closest country (UK with about 30,000 deaths). To put it into perspective: Vietnam claimed the lives of 58,220 Americans, while according to the CDC the 2018-19 flu season claimed 34,200. Unfortunately, we have not yet

begun to see the end of the devastation from the COVID-19 virus.

**Perhaps** the most difficult issue, when measured in terms of affecting a historic number of Americans, is the sudden loss of jobs for tens of millions of Americans. As of last week, the number of unemployment claims rose to over thirty-three million. While the vast majority of the country might not personally know anyone who died from the virus, undoubtedly most Americans know someone who is now suddenly out of work.

**To understand** what this number really means: Thirty-three million is equivalent to 20% of the national

workforce. In order to fully appreciate how sudden and shocking this is, consider that a scant eight weeks ago the unemployment rate was at 3.5% – a historic 50-year low. The shock to the collective American economic engine has been devastating on every level.

**The prospect** of losing one's job is obviously very difficult to cope with for many reasons; however, one of the toughest aspects of job loss is the effect it has on one's psyche. According to numerous studies, a job is more than just a paycheck, it plays a big role in determining how we perceive ourselves. Losing a job can feel like losing a part of who we are. As John Lennon once said, "Work is life, you know, and without it, there's nothing but fear and insecurity."

**When two strangers meet**, the first question generally asked is, "What do you do?" For many, if not most people, what they "do" defines who they are. Findings from these studies suggest that losing one's job doesn't just cause economic stress, it can also have a major impact on how we view ourselves and our sense of personal identity.

**Of course**, this week's Torah has a relevant message that speaks to this very issue:

*If your brother becomes impoverished and his hand falters...you shall hold on to him... (Leviticus 25:35)*

**We find** a puzzling Midrash on this verse that discusses the concept of one's responsibility to help a poor person. The Midrash states that if we don't help a poor person now, then the following year he will need a lot more help. The Midrash ends cryptically; if we neglect to fulfill our responsibility to help we are actually robbing the poor.

**But how** is not giving charity equivalent to stealing from the poor? It

seems very difficult to equate not giving charity with stealing; one is a sin of omission and the other is a sin of commission.

**We find** a remarkably similar discussion in the Talmud (*Brachos 6b*) regarding an enigmatic admonition from the prophet Yeshaya (Isaiah): "What you have stolen from the poor is in your houses" (*Yeshaya 3:14*). According to the commentaries, the Talmud is bothered by the odd limitation of merely stealing from the poor. After all, stealing from the rich is also a terrible sin!

**Additionally**, it doesn't even seem to make sense to expend the effort to steal from the poor; how much can one realistically take? (As the famous bank robber Willie Sutton supposedly answered when asked why he robbed banks, "because that's where the money is.")

**To explain** what the prophet Yeshaya meant when he criticized his generation for "stealing from the poor," the Talmud makes a remarkable statement: "This is referring to a situation where one greets you and you ignore him." Obviously, ignoring someone's friendly overture is improper and perhaps even boorish behavior, but why do the Jewish sages refer to this as stealing? What in fact was actually taken? Also, why is this specific to a poor person when this would similarly be hurtful to most people?

**The answer** is that you took something very, very valuable; you took the person's self-respect. By ignoring his friendly overture you actually made a very clear statement about what you think of him – that he isn't an entity worthy of a response. You denigrated his very existence. Obviously, this is very painful for anybody to experience, but it is particularly devastating to a poor person who already feels depressed about his situation and his stature.

**When someone** is particularly insecure about something, every slight – real or perceived – is attributed to that anxiety. When a person has low self-esteem, that insecurity is projected into almost every situational interaction with others. For example, in a marriage one spouse may fly into a jealous rage because deep down they don't really see why their spouse wants to be with them. (I am reminded of a joke about a patient who called his therapist complaining, "My wife left me because I am too insecure. Wait – hang on – she's back. She just went to get a coffee.")

**The verse** in this week's Torah reading instructs us very explicitly on how we should view a fellow Jew that has fallen on hard times, "If your brother becomes impoverished [...]." In other words, we have to treat someone who needs our help as we would a blood brother. When a person helps his brother, he does not consider it charity. In fact a person ought to consider it a privilege to be able to help his family because he wants to see them succeed. Similarly, a child who receives help from his parents isn't made to feel like a charity case. Quite the opposite, he feels love and support, and ultimately validation, from his parents.

**When we** ignore the needs of a poor person we are taking away his self-esteem and telling him that he isn't worthy of our help. Destroying a person's self-respect will predictably lead to dire consequences. A person with low self-esteem has no interest in improving his situation because he feels inadequate, incapable, and unworthy of better circumstances. This is why if you don't help a poor person now, then the following year it becomes exponentially worse; destroying their self-esteem creates a devastating downward spiral.

**Therefore,** when we give charity, we must make every effort to ensure that the recipient doesn't feel like a charity case; he must feel that it is our honor to be able to help because we believe in him and respect him. If a person knows that he has a backer who believes in him, he will inevitably "pull himself up by the bootstraps" and improve his own situation. The Torah is teaching us that the antidote to poverty is creating a relationship with someone who needs our help. Ultimately, this validation enables the person to help himself.

**Because** the root cause of a person's insecurity is mostly related to how they perceive themselves, the greatest gift we can give someone is a way to feel better about themselves. During these difficult times, when so many fellow humans are suffering, we must go out of our way to reach out and tell people how much we appreciate them and what it is about them that we find special.

**Set aside** a few minutes each day and start by calling those who you know are having a difficult time. Ask them how they are **really** doing, listen to them, and focus on making them feel valued and important. You will undoubtedly ease someone's suffering. After the initial calls, begin reaching out to friends or relatives whom you haven't been in contact with for years (or perhaps decades!). Remind them that they are important to you and that you are thinking of them.

**Even** when interacting with strangers, from a distance of course (six feet or more!), acknowledge them; wave or nod in their direction (smiling doesn't really work when wearing a mask). Convey the understanding that we are all connected through our shared humanity and difficult circumstances. You can be certain to make a positive impact on them, in addition to fulfilling our sages dictum: "Greet



everybody with a cheerful and pleasant countenance" (*Ethics of our Fathers* 1:15). This is the very essence of making each person feel valued.



## TORAH PORTION OF THE WEEK

**Behar-Bechukosai, Leviticus 25:1 - 27:34**

**Behar** begins with the laws of *Shemita*, the Sabbatical year, where the Jewish people are commanded not to plant their fields or tend to them in the 7<sup>th</sup> year. Every 50<sup>th</sup> year is the *Yovel* (Jubilee year) when agricultural activity is also proscribed.

**These two commandments** fall into one of the seven categories of evidence that God gave the Torah. If the idea is to give the land a rest, then do not plant one-seventh of the land each year. To command an agrarian society to completely stop cultivating every 7<sup>th</sup> year one has to be either God or a *meshugenah* (crazy).

**Also** included in this portion: redeeming land which was sold, to strengthen your fellow Jew when his economic means are faltering, not to lend to your fellow Jew with interest, and the laws

of indentured servants. The portion ends with the admonition to not make idols, to observe the Shabbat, and to revere the Sanctuary.

**The second portion** for this week, *Bechukosai*, begins with the multitude of blessings you will receive for keeping the commandments of the Torah (truly worth reading!). It also contains the *tochachah*, words of admonition: "If you will not listen to Me and will not perform all of these commandments..." There are seven series of seven punishments each. Understand that God does not punish for punishment's sake; He wants to get our attention so that we will introspect, recognize our errors, and correct our ways. God does not wish to destroy us or annul His covenant with us. He wants us to know that there are consequences for our every action. He also wants to get our attention so that we do not stray so far away that we assimilate and disappear as a nation. I highly recommend reading *Lev. 26:14 - 45* and *Deut. 28*.



In loving memory of  
Rabbi Kalman Packouz  
Kalman Moshe ben  
Reuven Avigdor  
1950-2019  
*Shabbat Shalom,*  
Rabbi Yitzchak Zweig

THE KEHILLA WISHES חיים ארוכים "LONG LIFE"  
TO THE FOLLOWING WHO HAVE YAHRZEIT

- |                             |                                |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 01 Iyar Miss Florence David | 12 Iyar Mr Jack Fattal         |
| 01 Iyar Mrs Bekhor          | 12 Iyar Mr Meir Fattal         |
| 04 Iyar Mrs Annie Benjamin  | 15 Iyar Mrs Esther Silas       |
| 06 Iyar Mr Abraham S. Cohen | 18 Iyar Mr Saul Ceasar Hannuna |
| 08 Iyar Mr Joseph Laniado   | 19 Iyar Mr Abraham S. Cohen    |
| 12 Iyar Mr Harry Fattal     | 26 Iyar Mrs Tiba David         |

Quote of the Week

**Belligerence is the hallmark of insecurity.**