

Kol Rina  
*An Independent Minyan*  
Parashat Bechukotia  
May June 1, 2024 \*\*\* 24 Iyar, 5784

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Bechukotai in a Nutshell

[https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article\\_cdo/aid/2098/jewish/Bechukotai-in-a-Nutshell.htm](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/2098/jewish/Bechukotai-in-a-Nutshell.htm)

The name of the Parshah, "Bechukotai," means "in My statutes" and it is found in Leviticus 26:3.

G-d promises that if the people of Israel will keep His commandments, they will enjoy material prosperity and dwell securely in their homeland. But He also delivers a harsh "rebuke," warning of the exile, persecution and other evils that will befall them if they abandon their covenant with Him.

Nevertheless, "Even when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not cast them away; nor will I ever abhor them, to destroy them and to break My covenant with them; for I am the L-rd their G-d."

The Parshah concludes with the rules on how to calculate the values of different types of pledges made to G-d, and the mitzvah of tithing produce and livestock.

Haftarah in a Nutshell: Jeremiah 16: 19 – 17:14

[https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article\\_cdo/aid/671843/jewish/Haftarah-in-a-Nutshell.htm](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/671843/jewish/Haftarah-in-a-Nutshell.htm)

The *haftarah* discusses the punishments that await those who disregard G-d's law, and the blessings that are the lot of those who follow the Creator's wishes. This follows the theme of this week's Torah reading which details at length the blessings and curses.

The prophet Jeremiah rebukes the people of Israel for their idolatrous ways and for not having faith in G-d. He conveys G-d's words of wrath towards those who do not put their trust in Him — foretelling exile as their punishment — and of blessings for those who do.

"Cursed is the man who trusts in man and relies on mortal flesh for his strength, and whose heart turns away from the G-d. He shall be like a lone tree in the desert, and will not see when good comes, and will dwell on parched land in the desert, on salt-sodden soil that is not habitable. Blessed is the man who trusts in the G-d, to whom G-d will be his trust. For he shall be like a tree planted by the water, and which spreads its roots out into a stream, so it will not be affected when heat comes, and its leaves shall be green, and in the year of drought will not be anxious, neither shall it cease from bearing fruit."

The *haftorah* ends with the following poignant verses: "G-d who is the source of the hopes of Israel, all that forsake You shall be shamed, and they who turn away from me shall be marked out on the earth that they have forsaken G-d, the source of living waters. Heal me, O G-d, then shall I be healed; help me, then I shall be helped, for You are my praise!"

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

### [The Rejection of Rejection by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks z"l \(5771\)](https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/bechukotai/the-rejection-of-rejection/)

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There is one aspect of Christianity that Jews, if we are to be honest, must reject, and that Christians, most notably Pope John XXIII, have also begun to reject. It is the concept of rejection itself, the idea that Christianity represents God's rejection of the Jewish People, the "old Israel".

This is known technically as Supersession or Replacement Theology, and it is enshrined in such phrases as the Christian name for the Hebrew Bible, "The Old Testament." The Old Testament means the testament - or covenant - once in force but no longer. On this view, God no longer wants us to serve Him the Jewish way, through the 613 commandments, but a new way, through a New Testament. His old chosen people were the physical descendants of Abraham. His new chosen people are the spiritual descendants of Abraham, in other words, not Jews but Christians.

The results of this doctrine were devastating. They were chronicled after the Holocaust by the French historian and Holocaust survivor Jules Isaac. More recently, they have been set out in works like Rosemary Ruether's *Faith and Fratricide*, and James Carroll's *Constantine's Sword*. They led to centuries of

persecution and to Jews being treated as a pariah people. Reading Jules Isaac's work led to a profound metanoia or change of heart on the part of Pope John XXIII, and ultimately to the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) and the declaration *Nostra Aetate*, which transformed relations between the Catholic Church and the Jews.

I don't want to explore the tragic consequences of this belief here, but rather its untenability in the light of the sources themselves. To our surprise, the key statement occurs in perhaps the darkest passage of the entire Torah, the curses of *Bechukotai*. Here, in the starkest possible terms, Moses sets out the consequences of the choices that we, Israel, make. If we stay faithful to God we will be blessed. But if we are faithless the results will be defeat, devastation, destruction, and despair. The rhetoric is relentless, the warning unmistakable, the vision terrifying. Yet at the very end come these utterly unexpected lines:

And yet for all that, when they be in the land of their enemies, I will not cast them away, neither will I abhor them, to destroy them utterly, and to break My covenant with them: for I am the Lord their God. But I will for their sakes remember the covenant of their ancestors, whom I brought forth out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the heathen, that I might be their God: I am the Lord. [Lev. 26:44-45](#)

The people may be faithless to God but God will never be faithless to the people. He may punish them but He will not abandon them. He may judge them harshly but He will not forget their ancestors, who followed Him, nor will He break the covenant He made with them. God does not break His promises, even if we break ours.

The point is fundamental. The Talmud describes a conversation between the Jewish exiles in Babylon and a Prophet:

Samuel said: Ten men came and sat down before the prophet. He told them, "Return and repent." They answered, "If a master sells his slave, or a husband divorces his wife, has one a claim upon the other?" Then the Holy One, blessed be He, said to the prophet, "Go and say to them, "Thus says the Lord: Where is your mother's certificate of divorce with which I sent her away? Or to which of My creditors did I sell you? Because of your sins you were sold; because of your transgressions your mother was sent away." [Isaiah 50:1](#); [Sanhedrin 105a](#)

The Talmud places in the mouths of the exiles an argument later repeated by Spinoza, the suggestion that the very fact of exile terminated the covenant between God and the Jewish people. God had rescued them from Egypt and

thereby become, in a strong sense, their only Sovereign, their King. But now, having allowed them to suffer exile, He has abandoned them and they are now under the rule of another king, the ruler of Babylon. It is as if He has sold them to another master, or as if Israel were a wife God had divorced. Having sold or divorced them, God could have no further claim on them.

It is precisely this that the verse in Isaiah – “Where is your mother’s certificate of divorce with which I sent her away? Or to which of my creditors did I sell you?” – denies. God has not divorced, sold, or abandoned His people. That too is the meaning of the promise at the end of the curses of [Bechukotai](#): “And yet for all that, when they be in the land of their enemies, I will not cast them away . . . and break My covenant with them: for I am the Lord their God.” God may send His people into exile but they remain His people, and He will bring them back.

This, too, is the meaning of the great prophecy in Jeremiah:

This is what the Lord says, He who appoints the sun to shine by day, who decrees the moon and stars to shine by night, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar - the Lord Almighty is His name:

“Only if these decrees vanish from My sight,” declares the Lord, “Will Israel ever cease being a nation before me?”

This is what the Lord says: “Only if the heavens above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth below be searched out, will I reject all the descendants of Israel because of all they have done!” [Jeremiah 31:35-37](#)

A central theme of the Torah, and of Tanach as a whole, is the rejection of rejection. God rejects humanity, saving only Noah, when He sees the world full of violence. Yet after the Flood He vows: “Never again will I curse the ground because of humans, even though every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood. And never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done” ([Gen. 8:21](#)). That is the first rejection of rejection.

Then comes the series of sibling rivalries. The covenant passes through Isaac not Ishmael, Jacob not Esau. But God hears Hagar’s and Ishmael’s cries. Implicitly He hears Esau’s also, for He later commands, “Do not hate an Edomite [i.e. a descendant of Esau] because he is your brother” ([Deut. 23:7](#)). Finally God brings it about that Levi, one of the children Jacob curses on his deathbed, “Cursed be their anger, so fierce, and their fury, so cruel” ([Gen. 49:6](#)), becomes the father of Israel’s spiritual leaders, Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. From now on all Israel are chosen. That is the second rejection of rejection.

Even when Israel suffer exile and find themselves “in the land of their enemies”

they are still the children of God's covenant, which He will not break because God does not abandon His people. They may be faithless to Him. He will not be faithless to them. That is the third rejection of rejection, stated in our *parsha*, reiterated by Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, axiomatic to our faith in a God who keeps His promises.

Thus the claim on which Replacement or Supersession theology is based – that God rejects His people because they rejected Him – is unthinkable in terms of Abrahamic monotheism. God keeps His word even if others break theirs. God does not, will not, abandon His people. The covenant with Abraham, given content at Mount Sinai, and renewed at every critical juncture in Israel's history since, is still in force, undiminished, unqualified, unbreakable.

The Old Testament is not old. God's covenant with the Jewish people is still alive, still strong. Acknowledgement of this fact has transformed the relationship between Christians and Jews and helped wipe away many centuries of tears.

### [Parshat Bechukotai: The Blessing of Rain](https://www.growtorah.org/vayikra/2022/05/25-parshat-bechukotai-the-blessing-of-rain)

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Tefillah for rain is a key part of the spiritual life of a Jew. For almost half of the year, our daily prayers include praise of Hashem as the One "Who makes the wind blow and the rain descend" and a request that Hashem will "give dew and rain for a blessing." [1] A special blessing for rain appears in the liturgy on Shemini Atzeret, at the beginning of Israel's rainy season. We pray that Hashem brings beneficial rain, which falls at the right time, to nourish our crops and fill our reservoirs. As the Talmud says, "The day when rain falls is as great as the day on which heaven and earth were created." [2]

The Torah teaches that our actions impact the rain as well. At the beginning of this week's parsha, Parshat Bechukotai, we read that rainfall is a function of our doing Hashem's will. If we keep the Torah, Hashem says, "I will give your rains in their time, the land will yield its produce, and the tree of the field will give forth its fruit... you will eat your food to satiety, and you will live in security in your land, and I will grant peace in the land." [3] This promise of abundant rains and prosperity is followed by a warning that, should Israel ignore the Torah, Hashem will "make your skies like iron," the Midrash defining this as ceasing all rains and bringing drought. [4] Conversely, the fact that we specifically ask that the rain be "for a blessing," acknowledges that too much rain is just as dangerous as not having enough. In a number of instances in the Tanach, Hashem sent rain that was a curse, not a blessing. The Mabul came to punish the generation for transgressing Hashem's will. Rashi explains that the rains of blessing only became

a destructive flood when the people refused to do teshuva.[5] In the time of Shmuel Hanavi, Hashem brought thunder and rain to chastise the people.[6]

For centuries, it has been a core principle of Jewish faith that the natural world was a domain within the spiritual world, not an entity outside its purview. With a modern scientific understanding that human actions affect the quality and quantity of rain, the warning of Bechukotai warrants our attention. We must reawaken the awareness that our actions impact the entire planet.

The effect of industrialized society on rain through pollutants has been well-known for decades—we've all heard of acid rain. In the 21st century, our impact on the rain is becoming even more pronounced. A consensus of scientists states that human-caused climate change is increasing storm intensity and raising the seas. By burning fossil fuels in our cars, homes, factories, and planes, we are increasing the carbon dioxide level in the atmosphere.

We not only affect how rain descends but also how that rain impacts the land when it does fall. With increasing urbanization in the world, land that once soaked up rainwater is being covered in pavement, which prevents the rainwater from replenishing underground aquifers (also referred to as "groundwater" or "the water table"). Aquifers directly provide more than one-third of drinking water in America, and contribute, in some part, to all drinking water sources.[7] In some places, like Florida, aquifers provide 100% of the drinking water as well as the majority of clean water for industrial and agricultural use.[8] When rainwater is prevented from replenishing the water table, one of our most necessary resources—clean drinking water—is compromised.

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the amount of U.S. land covered by sprawling urban development increased by 50% during the 1980s and 1990s. [9] Increased building covers the land with impervious paving, which prevents the land from absorbing rains back into the water table. Unabsorbed rainwater becomes runoff, flowing through drainage systems (or causing floods when drains and sewers are overburdened), picking up pollutants along the way, which are then dumped into lakes, streams and oceans. Atlanta, which was struck by a major drought in 2007, leads American cities in lost rainwater, with up to 132.8 billion gallons lost per year.[10] The volume of water lost in the United States each year would provide tens of millions of people with their annual water needs.

Today we have an unbelievably complex understanding of how the earth's systems work, and how we impact them. In viewing the connection between humans and the environment through scientific analysis and statistics, we must be careful not to forget the true lesson of Bechukotai—Hashem has created the world in such a way that when we contradict Hashem's will by living out of balance, our lives are

thrown out of balance in response. Rabbi Yehuda HaLevi Ashlag (Ba'al Hasulam), a leading kabbalist of the twentieth century, wrote that Hashem established the laws of nature in the world, and a person or society that transgresses one of these laws will be punished by means of nature.[13] We see from this that we cannot ignore the connection between our actions, both those of the general mitzvot and of caring for Hashem's earth and the physical conditions that surround us.[14] Scientific explanations of storm patterns, aquifer absorption and rain toxicity should not obscure the influence of the HaKadosh Baruch Hu. Rather, they reveal to us the true greatness of Divine wisdom and confirm that we really are obligated to live in balance with and be stewards of Hashem's Creation, as the Torah requires.

Praying for beneficial rain and then ignoring the problems of climate change and unchecked urban development is like praying for good health and then continuing to eat poorly and avoid exercise. We are acting against our own expressed interests when we excessively burn fossil fuels and contribute to unchecked urban expansion.

Our prayers for beneficial rain are extremely important, and our actions should be consistent with the emphasis of our tefillot. We must live as earnestly as we pray. By doing so, we can give our children the gift of a world that is blessed, as Hashem promises, with rains of abundance, prosperity and peace.

[1] Translation adapted from Artscroll Siddur [2] Talmud Bavli, Mesechet Ta'anit 8b, Artscroll translation. [3] Vayikra 26:4-6. All translations of verses from the Torah are from Judaica Press, [4] Torath Kohanim 26:28, as cited by Rashi to Vayikra 26:19. Ramban on Vayikra 24:4 discusses how beneficial rain improves human health and increases produce. He calls this blessing of the rains "the greatest of all blessings." [5] Based on the Midrash Hane'lam and the Zohar Chadash 28a. Translation by Artscroll Rashi Chumash [6] I Shmuel 12:17-18 [7] "Paving our way to water shortages: How sprawl aggravates drought." [8] See the report on Florida's aquifers [9] According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Inventory. (see footnote 8) [10] Co-operative study [11] See, for example, a series on Toronto's urban sprawl. [12] See "Open Space in Israel," Israel Environment Bulletin, vol. 29, Sept. 2005 [13] From "The Need for Caution in the Laws of Nature," (in Hebrew) in Matan Torah, publisher Da'at Ohr HaGanuz, year unknown, p. 96-99. In Gematria (a mystical numbering system), the letters of the word 'hateva' (the nature), add up to the same amount (86) as Hashem's name that connotes judgment—Elokim. Rabbi Ashlag teaches that this implies that the laws of Hashem can be called by the name 'commandments of nature.' He does not write about transgressing the 'laws of nature' in the context of ecological issues, but in the context of an individual isolating themselves from society. The application of Rabbi Ashlag's teachings here to ecology, a discipline that developed after Rabbi Ashlag lived, is by the author of this dvar Torah and not by Rabbi Ashlag himself. I would like to thank Rabbi Adam Perlman for pointing me to this source and teaching the linkage to environmental issues.

[14] In this vein, the emphasis of Bechukotai on the linkage between keeping the Torah and

beneficial rains is different than Rav Ashlag's understanding of a connection between proper action and 'the laws of nature.' Nevertheless, a similarity does exist in both the Torah portion's and Rav Ashlag's emphasis on the relation between human action and what happens in the natural world around us. [15] The following suggestions are taken from Rabbi Shmuel Simenowitz, "Water Conservation and Halacha: An Unorthodox Approach." Compendium of Sources on Halakha and the Environment. Canfei Nesharim, 2005.

### Bechukotai: God and Us Under Stress by Rabbi Michal Woll

[https://truah.org/resources/michal-woll-bechukotai-moraltorah\\_2024/](https://truah.org/resources/michal-woll-bechukotai-moraltorah_2024/)

"If by my laws you walk, and my commands you keep, and observe them..."

(Leviticus 26:3)

We are familiar with this theme, one of the most common in Torah. In my Reconstructionist community, we have little difficulty reframing this ancient system of cause and effect. We are also pretty adept at engaging with the human personification of God that appears in the Torah. These approaches support the concept that we must be/do like God to bring divinity into the world. So I was surprised to find myself surprised this year while preparing a bar mitzvah student for their d'var Torah on Parshat Bechukotai.

We began to read the text and noticed that the rewards were pretty outrageous: the earth yielding produce beyond its sowing; safety from enemies and beasts; taking meandering walks with God as in the Garden of Eden. These should have prepared us for what was to come next: "But if you do not hearken to me.... I will mete out shock to you, and consumption, and fever" (Leviticus 26:14,16). I don't think we made it through another verse. The student stopped reading; mom ruffled her brow; I stared at my book. We are accustomed to the idea that God might threaten us indirectly by altering the natural world, but this sort of direct assault took our breath away.

I later revisited the text, reaching another unique and difficult passage: "If after this you will not hearken to me.... I will discipline you sevenfold for your sins" (Leviticus 26:27-28). I was transported back almost 30 years, as a friend and I studied a new Torah commentary together in my backyard: "And if our relationship is still strained, I commit sevenfold to our healing..." In his 'Meta Parshiot' on Bechukotai (5755-5757) my teacher, Reb David Wolfe-Blank *zichrono livracha*, engaged in a years-long project using Chasidic commentaries and techniques to transform this troubling passage, stating: "The Torah's threats are not acceptable in their *p'shat* – plain meaning." Rather, he taught that this escalation of demand and punishment is a sign of disconnection. We may be hearing God's demand but we are not responding. Why not? What is God misunderstanding about us?

And why is God so angry and vengeful here at the conclusion of Leviticus, a book filled almost entirely with regulations, without pesky human activity to rile God up?



Is it the isolation of existing so far from the people? Is Moses nodding off over his notebook? Is God worried that the extensive list of expectations is likely unrealistic? Answering this “why?” may be best left to a new midrash, but perhaps we can explore “how” this disruption occurred.

I want to suggest an answer based on psychology, which I have long loved, especially archetype-based approaches such as the Enneagram. The Enneagram is a system of personality sorting that describes nine (*ennea* in Greek) distinct personality types, each with their own core strengths, motivations, and fears. The most intriguing aspect of the Enneagram to me is how each type will morph into different types when under stress or when feeling unusually positive.

Perhaps God is the ultimate Enneagram Type 1, the *Reformer* or *Perfectionist*, motivated by the need to live rightly and driven by a longing for a true, just, and moral world, but with a tendency to become self-righteous. When things are going well, this personality becomes an enthusiastic gourmand, wishing to experience and treat others to all of life’s pleasures, without constraint. Yet when stressed, their world falls to pieces as disappointment in themselves spills into every aspect of life including those around them. Sound familiar? It should.

As people committed to human rights and justice, many of us share this Enneagram personality: the sense of drive and mission, the lofty vision. But this means we also share the dangers of falling to pieces or unrealistic visions of grandeur. As rabbis and community leaders, we, and God, are as likely to be an Enneagram Type 8, the *Controller* or *Protector*, believing in our gut that it is our job to combat oppression and stand up for those weaker than ourselves but sometimes becoming a bit domineering. When we are challenged, our confidence withdraws into fear and isolation, but at our best, we have the potential to be truly open-hearted and caring.

We don’t know precisely why God is stressed, but we *do* know why *we* are. We live in an age of extreme views, division, and disconnection, especially since October 7. We are often functioning far from our cores, where we can access our unique strengths and talents, offer our best selves, and hear – and perhaps even seek – other voices.

As we conclude the book of Leviticus, tradition tells us to lift up the Torah and exclaim *chazak, chazak, v’nitchazek!* – give strength so that we may strengthen ourselves! Through self-knowledge, self-care, and support around us, we can offer our strengths to the world and keep ourselves — and one another — strong. (A *third career rabbi*, Michal Woll is the spiritual leader of Congregation Shir Hadash in Mil., WI. )

[The Terrifying Third Aliyah of Behukotai by Marcus Mordechai Schwartz](#)

I have always found the third aliyah (Torah-reading section) of Parashat Behukkotai, read in the synagogue this Shabbat, to be terrifying. [Leviticus 26:10–46](#) begins with a series of Divine blessings, such as:

*. . . I will establish My abode in your midst, and I will not spurn you. I will be ever present in your midst: I will be your God, and you shall be My people. ([Lev. 26: 11–12](#))*

We receive Divine assurance of a close and loving relationship with God, one that has important implications for material wealth and success: if the Israelites follow the Torah, they will be blessed with the warm and affectionate presence of the God of Israel. But the tone shifts ominously almost immediately:

*But if you do not obey Me and do not observe all these commandments, if you reject My laws and spurn My rules, so that you do not observe all My commandments and you break My covenant, I in turn will do this to you . . . ([14–16](#))*

If the Israelites do not keep the mitzvot, there will be devastating consequences: misery and pain, consumption and fever, failed crops and stolen harvests, humiliating defeats and brutal beasts, plague and famine. Scholars have long noted that this section (14–39) of curses (khalot) and rebuke (tokhahah) is nearly three times as long as the section of blessings (3–13) that proceeds it. The consolation at the end is also short: The survivors of this catastrophe, now in exile in the land of their foes, will experience a change of heart, and laying aside their old habit of transgression, will honestly confess their sin and find favor with God. The Torah promises them:

*Yet, even then, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not reject or spurn them, or destroy them, or annul My covenant with them.*

For the sake of the “covenant with the first-ones” (the earliest Fathers and Mothers of the people) the Israelites will find themselves back in their Creator’s powerful loving embrace.

Why do we continue to read such horrible curses, and another passage much like it in Parashat Ki Tavo ([Deut. 28:1–68](#)), each year? The simplest answer is that we read the entirety of the Torah each year, omitting nothing. However, the Mishnah ([Megillah 3:6](#)) already notes something special about the curses of the Leviticus passage: “The section of curses must not be broken up but must all be read by one person.”

One of the comments we find in the Talmud explaining this practice tries to balance this need for completeness with the need for some relief:

*"Rabbi Shimon son of Lakish said: [We read it in a single go] so that the blessing [typically recited at the beginning of the reading] isn't said over punishment." What should a person do? It was taught: "One should start reading in the passage before the section [of curses] and conclude in the passage after it." (B. [Megillah 31b](#))*

Rabbi Shimon son of Lakish (Resh Lakish) asserts that we should read the curses bracketed by two adjacent sections of blessing in a single reading so that the person who makes the blessing "noten hatorah" can be said to have done so over passages that describe blessings rather than curses.

But this is not the only way that we bracket these two lengthy passages of curses. We may have no choice but to read them, but we can control when we read them in the course of the year. Later in the same Talmudic passage we read:

*It has been taught: "Rabbi Simeon b. Eleazar says: Ezra made a regulation for Israel that they should read the curses in Leviticus before Shavuot and those in Deuteronomy before Rosh Ha-Shanah." What is the reason? Abaye—or some say it was Resh Lakish—said: "So that when the year ends, so will its curses."*

In other words, we read these curses just before the year's seasonal turn so that—in a sort of merciful act—the curses are only in effect until the conclusion of the ritual resetting of the year. The declaration of curses is an annual warning. Twice a year we are read the "riot act" and cautioned to be on our best behavior. But the punishment could only befall us until the end of the holiday period that concludes that portion of the year. For the fall harvest this would be the day after Shemini Atzeret (the convocation for Sukkot—the day after is the 22nd of Tishrei). And the Talmud continues:

*Shavuot is also a New Year, as we have learnt in a Mishnah (Rosh Ha-Shanah 1:2): "Shavuot is the new year for fruit from trees."*

Thus, for the summer the period would end the week after Shavuot (a week, not a day, since we count seven weeks leading up to the festival) on the 15th of Sivan (this year, Friday June 21st). The Torah reading is structured in such a way that each period of danger lasts about a month. As Maimonides writes in the Mishneh Torah (Tefillah 13:2):

*Ezra instituted the practice of having the Jews read the curses found in the book of Leviticus before Shavuot, and those found in the book of Deuteronomy before*

*Rosh Hashanah. It is a common custom to read Bemidbar before Shavuot [and] . . . Nitzavim before Rosh Hashanah . . .*

In other words, there is one parashah each that separates the curses in Behukkotai and Ki Tavo by one week from Shavuot and Rosh Hashanah respectively: Bemidbar, the parashah after Behukkotai, is always read before Shavuot. Nitzavim, the parashah after Ki Tavo, is always read before Rosh Hashanah. Why do we extend the period by a week each year? According to Mordecai ben Avraham Yoffe (c. 1530–1612) in his halakhic work Levush Malkhut, this limits the time (or perhaps the immediacy of the claim) that the demonic prosecutor has to bring Israel's sins to God's attention:

*. . . and we also pause a week, so that the curses are not read immediately before Shavuot, since this [festival] is the day of judgment for the trees. And we do not want to give a claim to the Satan that he could use for [their] prosecution, heaven forbid!*

It is important to note that Yoffe sees two different types of danger here: in the fall the danger is from enemies, disease, or violent calamity; in the summer the danger is to agriculture, the environment, and economic conditions. In other words, there are two kinds of threats. One sort of threat is to our person, our bodies, and our physical well-being. The other is to our world, our livelihood, and the well-being of our property. Which is the greater threat? The more immediate threat to our lives is violence and calamity. But ultimately, the greater threat is the environmental one. We will all die, eventually, but we hope the world will be a place that our descendants can live on in abundance after us. If we cannot give them a safe place to live, how is any sort of future possible?

May the Ribono shel olam grant us the strength to face both sorts of challenges and may we and those we love pass through all periods of danger well, unharmed, and full of blessings and abundance! (*Marchus Mordecai Schwartz is the Ripps Schnitzer Librarian FOR Special Collections; Assistant Professor, Talmuds and Rabbinics.*)

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### YAHRTZEITS

Sylvia Orenstein and all of Kol Rina remember her husband Rabbi Jehiel Orenstein on Sunday June 2.

Nikki Pusan and Russett Feldman remember their cousin Rabbi Jehiel Orenstein on Sunday June 2.

Cornelia and Francesca Peckman remember their mother Melita Peckman on Wednesday June 5.

Jane Carter remembers her brother Benjamin Bishkoff on Thursday June 6.

