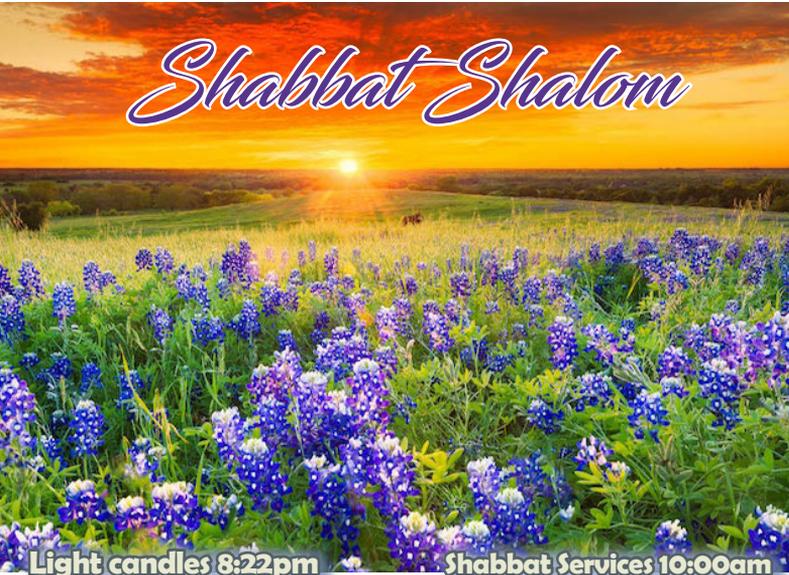




Carnegie Shul Chatter

May 26, 2022

Shabbat Shalom



Light candles 8:22pm

Shabbat Services 10:00am

Bechukotai in a Nutshell

Leviticus 26:3–27:34

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.

Zoom in for Services

Shabbat services are held by Zoom, at 10am and last 60-90 minutes. A link is sent to all Shul members; if you don't receive it, contact Wendy Panizzi at panizziw@gmail.com.

Know What's Expected

People have different opinions about the books of the Jewish Bible they like the best. I know some who love Genesis and its stories of creation, the great flood, Sodom and Gommorah, and more. Others love Exodus and the Passover story. Few seem to love Leviticus and its laws. I am one, however, who really likes Leviticus.

Maybe its because I like law and order, and not just the TV show by the same name. I like having free choice, but I also like knowing what is expected of me, and Leviticus tells me that.

I like knowing that I am part of a people who were chosen by God to be all that they could be, all that God could want them to be. I am not a holy guy, but I like to strive to be part of a nation that God has challenged to be holy.

I like knowing that there is both right and wrong in this world, and that God has asked my people to be a part of what is right, and to set an example for the other nations of the world, to be

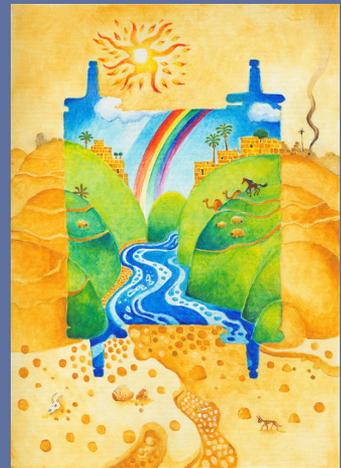
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a light unto the nations.

Yes, we Jews have not always lived up to our end of our covenant with God, but I love knowing that, “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.”

And I love knowing that I can always hope for a time when Israel will be restored and we can all return to the land that God promised to our ancestors.



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.

Bechukotai

This week’s parshah, Bechukotai, is the last parshah in the book of Leviticus, a book that is full of mitzvot, laws given to the Jewish people on their journey from Egypt to the Holy Land, intended to separate us from the other nations that we were to encounter on our journey. Why? Because these nations worshipped idols and false gods, and performed rituals such as sacrificing children to their gods, practices that God considered to be an abomination and practices which his chosen nation, the Children of Israel, were expressly forbidden from doing.



We were to be a holy people, and we were promised rewards for following the mitzvot found in Leviticus. But if we did not follow the mitzvot, then there would surely be punishments to come, and these rewards and mitzvot are clearly defined in parshah Bechukotai.

It is also interesting to note that, even if the Jewish people failed to follow the mitzvot as instructed, and even if the severe punishments fell upon them, God would still be with them. As the parshah states, “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.”

Yes, we were exiled from the Holy Land. Yes, we have suffered greatly in exile. But the Lord is still with us. As Rabbi Jonathon Sacks is quoted as saying in the following article, “to be a Jew is to be an agent of hope in a world serially threatened by despair. Every ritual, every mitzvah, every syllable of the Jewish story, every element of Jewish law, is a protest against escapism, resignation or the blind acceptance of fate. Judaism is a sustained struggle, the greatest ever known, against the world that is, in the name of the world that could be, should be, but is not yet. There is no more challenging vocation. Throughout history, when human beings have sought hope they have found it in the Jewish story. Judaism is the religion, and Israel the home, of hope.”

The article is from a source I have not used before, campramahne.org. I hope you enjoy it.

D'var Torah: Parshat Bechukotai – Judaism is Built on Hope

*Josh Edelglass
May 15, 2020*

I found myself thinking about Star Wars today. OK, truthfully, I am often thinking about Star Wars! But I was particularly thinking about Star Wars today, reading parshat Bechukotai, which is the final parshah of the book of Vayikra. (This Shabbat, we read a double-portion of Behar and Bechukotai.) There is a lengthy stretch in Bechukotai in which we read what's known as the Tochechah. It is a series of curses, describing the catastrophes that will befall the Israelites if they turn away from Hashem. I find this to be a disturbing and difficult passage of Torah to read.



But I love that this section ends with a U-turn. After reading all of these curses, in Vayikra 26:44-45, we read that “even then” Hashem “will not reject” the Israelites “or spurn them”, because “My covenant is with them; for I the Lord am their God.” I love this simple and powerful statement of God’s eternal connection with the Jewish people. And even more than that, I love it as a beautiful moment of hope, even in the darkness painted by that chapter of a world gone wrong.

This is what made me think about Star Wars: specifically *Rogue One*, my favorite of the modern Star Wars films. That film identifies hope as a critical value. With the rebels on the



verge of defeat and despair based on the seemingly insurmountable darkness that surrounds them, the heroine Jyn Erso rallies her comrades around her with the simple but memorable declaration: “Rebellions are built on hope.” The final line of the film is “hope,” spoken by Leia as she holds the stolen Death Star plans in her hands. It’s a beautiful segue into the opening of the original Star Wars which of course is subtitled (ever since its 1981 re-release to theaters, a year after *The Empire Strikes Back* came out) *A New Hope*.

Hope is central to Judaism. The national anthem of the State of Israel is *ha-Tikvah*: the hope. At camp each summer we commemorate *Tisha B’av*, a day that marks the terrible tragedy of the destruction of the Temple and the exile that followed. But Judaism doesn’t let us stay in mourning. The Shabbat that follows *Tisha B’Av* is *Shabbat Nachamu*, the Shabbat of comfort. (Hearing our *chanichim* sing “*nachamu*” in the *chorsha* (grove) at camp on that Shabbat is always one of my favorite camp moments each *kayitz!*)

I have often been inspired by Elie Wiesel’s statements on the importance of hope. Here’s one of my favorites: “One must wager on the future. I believe it is possible, in spite of everything, to believe in friendship in a world without friendship, and even to believe in God in a world where there has been an eclipse of God’s face...we must not give in to cynicism. To save the life of a single child, no effort is too much. To make a tired old man smile is to perform an essential task. To defeat injustice and misfortune, if only for one instant, for a single victim, is to invent a new reason to hope.”

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks has described hope as “one of the very greatest Jewish contributions to Western civilization.” He writes: “to be a Jew is to be an agent of hope in a world serially threatened by despair. Every ritual, every *mitzvah*, every syllable of the Jewish story, every element of Jewish law, is a protest against escapism, resignation or the blind acceptance of fate. Judaism is a sustained struggle, the greatest ever known, against the world that is, in the name of the world that could be, should be, but is not yet. There is no more challenging vocation. Throughout history, when human beings have sought hope they have found it in the Jewish story. Judaism is the religion, and Israel the home, of hope.”

This is a thought that brings me great comfort, and also profound inspiration, as I prepare to enter this Shabbat. *Shabbat Shalom*.

The second article that I am including, starting on the following page, comes from jewishstandard.timesofisrael.com. It reminded me of the old story of the Sunday Morning Christian who goes to church faithfully every Sunday morning and then goes out and commits a crime every Sunday afternoon. It is an interesting take on the subject of “Good” Jews and “Bad” Jews.

Bechukotai: A note to self-proclaimed ‘bad Jews’

By Rabbi Jennifer Schlosberg

May 30, 2019

I often hear, “I am a bad Jew, rabbi.”

What does this mean?

It usually means, “I’m sorry that I don’t come to shul more often” or “Please forgive me that I ate something not kosher” or “I don’t volunteer for the synagogue as much as I should.”

Essentially, I feel like it is a form of self-judgment or a declaration of embarrassment. Some may call it “Jewish guilt.” In either case, how should I respond to these self-proclaimed “bad Jews”?



We begin this week’s parasha, Bechukotai, with the following verse: “If you follow My laws and faithfully observe My commandments, I will give your rains in their season, so that the earth shall yield its produce and the trees of the field their fruit” (Leviticus 26:3).

I’ve always found this passage difficult to read. Why? Because it essentially says “do good, and good will come to you” and then — later in the parasha — “do bad, and bad will come to you.”

But we all know life does not always work out that way.

We all know people who are faithful to God’s commandments and, yet, tragic things happen to them. On the flip side, we also know people who do not follow the commandments or we know people who are unethical and yet, somehow, things just easily fall into their lap. This challenge of theodicy (“why bad things happen to good people”) is one of life’s essential questions for which we really have no answers. But, dare I say, should that change how we live our lives?

Regarding the verse above, rabbis have long asked why we need two phrases that essentially say the same thing. In other words, not only does this verse say, “if you follow my laws,” but it also says “if you faithfully observe my commandments.” Are both necessary? Isn’t that redundant?

According to various commentators, both phrases are needed because one phrase represents Torah study and the other represents observing the mitzvot. Torah study and observing the mitzvot — according to this verse — combine to bring goodness into this world. Alternatively, one can look at these two mitzvot sequentially and argue that Torah study leads to action.



But I have a different explanation.

The second phrase, “if you faithfully observe My commandments,” uses the Hebrew words “mitzvot” (commandments) and “lishmor” (“to observe”). This outlines an obligation to follow the commandments, such as observing Shabbat, keeping kosher, or praying. When someone says to me, “Rabbi, I am a bad Jew,” these are the ritual commandments they are skipping. Some would call these mitzvot “ben adam la’Makom,” commandments that are between an individual and God.

In contrast, the first phrase “if you will follow my laws” uses the Hebrew root for “la’lachat” or to “go,” or “walk.” This is the same root that comprises the word “halacha,” Jewish law, as it teaches us how to walk, live, eat and breathe in a sacred way in the world around us. I believe that this phrase represents how we lead our daily lives outside of the ritual mitzvot: how we treat the cashier in the grocery store or a waiter in a restaurant or how we speak to our family members behind closed doors. Some would call these mitzvot “ben adam la’chavero,” commandments that are between an individual and other people. But I believe this category also includes how we make ethical decisions when no one is watching us or how we take the high-road — even when it involves a great sacrifice or risk.

Why are both phrases necessary?

Because there are the ritual mitzvot and then there is everything else.

We can keep Shabbat and study Torah and daven every single day. We can light holiday candles and keep a kosher home and observe the laws of modesty, but that is only one part of the Jewish equation. The other part involves being a “God-fearing,” ethical person, treating others with respect, doing the right thing, living the “off-hours” with honor and sanctity.

Some of us could do better at keeping specific ritual mitzvot.

And some of us could build more sanctity into our daily interactions and whereabouts.

I don’t judge you or think you are a “bad Jew” if you are not following the ritual commandments. And — I don’t judge you if you lose your cool with your kids or act unwisely out of stress or speak out of turn.

So to those of you who feel like “bad Jews,” please remember:

Halacha is not limited to ritual matters. Halacha, Jewish law, is also how we live our lives in the “in-between.” The



Torah teaches us that both forms of holiness combine to bring goodness into the world.

Perhaps when the Torah says our observance of the commandments will provide us with rich crops and fruits or produce, what it really means is “live your life with goodness as if your life depended on it.” So while our actions might not be able to reverse the course of a terminal illness or prevent a natural disaster, we can at least celebrate the various ways we can live as “good Jews” in our daily pursuit of holiness.

Yahrtzeits

This week the Carnegie Shul acknowledges the yahrtzeits of:

Harry Burnkrant

Ethel Golanty

William Ash

Isaac Shenderovich

Ethel Ray Adler

Paul Kalson

Mildred G. Miller

Leonard Zemon

May their memories be for a blessing.