

25 – Behar-Bechukotai – Outline

Review

- the second half of Leviticus is building from the low place of the metzora
 - Yom Kippur follows, which is the answer
 - from that point on, there is an emphasis on holiness
 - “kadosh” mentioned 12 times in the last chapter, chapter 27
 - Emor, last week, focused on the connecting points of the priesthood and the mo’edim, both critical in the holy walk
 - now we reach the top of the mountain

Behar-Bechukotai Summary

- “Behar” = “at/in the mountain”
- “Bechukotai” = “in My statutes”
- Behar main topics:
 - shmita year- 7th-year rest for the land, forgiveness of debts
 - Jubilee (“Yovel”)- 50th year- return to one’s land (if it was sold), freedom for those in servitude, rest for the land (so, two years in a row of resting the land, since the 49th year is a shmita year)

Placing Behar

- R’Alon Anava: some consider this portion the “heart” of the Torah because it is the 32nd portion, and 32 is the number for “lev,” “heart”
- What do shmita and Jubilee have to do with nearing the top of the mountain (“behar”)?
 - at the top of the mountain, we 1) rest and 2) we take in the perspective from up there, a new perspective
 - rest:
 - obviously, these two are about rest, resting the Land, and resting from servitude, entering into the rest of freedom
 - we work with the goal in mind of the rest to come; through the work, we enter into a rest that is a depth of relationship with God, the rest of the Bride
 - reoriented perspective:
 - one’s status as free and one’s status as a landowner (land being the source of wealth) here becomes the default position; servitude and land ownership are re-cast in terms of the Jubilee, when servants are released and land is returned. It becomes a Jubilee-centered life perspective in terms of these two vital realms of life.
 - it’s like how Shabbat becomes the center of the week – each day is counted toward Shabbat (Sunday is the first day to Shabbat, Monday the second, etc.), and each day of

the week becomes a day to prepare for Shabbat (invite guests, shop, clean, cook on progressive days, for example)

- there is new perspective in the knowledge that God has made allowance for us to be freed from the consequences of the poor decisions we may have made or the poor decisions others made that have affected us
 - stop beating yourself up; in Messiah, that person is gone
 - and count yourself rich: rich in humility, rich in forgiveness for others, rich in your ability to connect with others still enslaved
 - God has placed limits on the fall, limits on the reach of the world
- studying the calendar also helps us see how each season brings a higher level and more rest

Standing Apart from the Ways of the World

- there's a stark contrast here with shmita and Jubilee between God's ways and man's ways
 - there's a word God uses here in this chapter that describes the world: "perek," meaning "ruthless;" the world is ruthless. God says 3 times here, "Do not rule over each other ruthlessly."
 - thoughts from the coronation of King Charles III and Queen Camila:
 - it was amazing
 - but the King and Queen were boxed into a script and more, as if they had to have a very blank expression, no personality
 - the unfortunate truth: if they dared step out of that box for an instant, there would be thousands criticizing them; it's part of the ruthless way of our world now, and technology has only made this spirit of criticism much worse
 - it's like God sees the direction the world wants to go, and He sees that the only answer is to twist that way so that it becomes much more of deadly self, for the purpose of exposing sin for what it is, leading to repentance
 - Grant: "And if by this discipline you are not turned to Me but walk casually ["keri"] with Me, then I also will walk casually with you, and I Myself will strike you sevenfold for your sins" (Leviticus 26:23-24)(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZueY3wKW PY> 15m)
 - God twists us into our direction: if we treat Him casually, He will fill our lives with unfortunate "coincidences"
 - Believers are called to do better, to stand away from the ruthlessness of the world, particularly as God twists it and lets it run to its bitter end. We stand for truth on the one

hand, but we also must protect ourselves against the spirit of criticism that is tearing the world apart and causing such anxiety today.

- the display of wealth was very appropriate for this situation, but it made me think about how wealth gets concentrated into few hands in a ruthless world
 - those with wealth use their position of advantage to gain more and more wealth
 - the “natural” way – survival of the fittest, as opposed to the “supernatural” way, which is God’s way
 - 20% interest on credit cards is not normal and not acceptable
 - the Bible is not silent on this issue; Behar is ground zero for what God has to say about it
 - allow for a great reset now and then; the bigger guys look out for the little guys, with wisdom
 - no political system on the planet is coming close to this right now
- we must question everything about what our world tells us is the normal way to function; we need to stay grounded in the Torah’s version of reality

Placing Bechukotai

- the subject of this portion is “if you walk in my statutes”
 - easy to see how this is the summit of the mountain – rest and peace are bound up with walking in God’s ways successfully
 - much to say about walking in God’s ways:
 - the commandments keep us from enslavement to the flesh
 - they are a mirror for us that helps us to see our true nature, which is love for God and our neighbors
 - they are the terms of a marriage contract; by them, we are joined to God, and through them we even produce the fruit of that marriage
 - He’s promising us life if we trust Him and walk according to the commandments
- why do we fail so much at walking in His commandments?
 - it’s usually fear, fear that we won’t be provided for
 - look death in the face and say, “Bring it. I don’t fear you. I will follow God, and if I die doing that, then so be it. You will not rule my life because fearing you is no life at all.”
 - if it’s not fear, it’s the pursuit of glory or pleasure that keep us from walking in the commandments
 - both are lies:
 - worldly glory ends up in the pit of shame
 - worldly pleasure is always temporary and leads to sickness and everything unpleasurable

- “Bechukotai” is actually pointing us to keeping the commandments from love, not just the letter of the law
 - “chuk” from “chakak,” meaning “to engrave”
 - goes deeper than writing
 - is an allusion to the writing of the Torah on the heart, through the blood of the Messiah and the New Covenant He mediates
 - this heart of love is expressed in the final chapter, which deals with extra vows one may take upon himself or herself that go beyond the Torah
 - from a heart of love
 - or from a heart of fear
 - it may be that the parent of a deathly ill child makes a vow to give the child’s valuation in silver to the Tabernacle if God spares the child
 - the topic of this final chapter is also an allusion to another end theme: judgment, the weighing of a life
 - this judgment is a “fixing” of our final form; we have an opportunity to acquire a form in this life on earth, either as a vessel for God’s Spirit to flow through, or a vessel that is blocked (uncircumcised)
 - our reward (but not our ultimate salvation) is based on our works
 - from the Brit Chadasha for this portion: “For the Son of Man is going to come with His angels in the glory of His Father, and then He will repay each person according to what he has done” (Matthew 16:27)

Yeshua

- Yeshua is ultimately our Judge:
 - John 5:22 says, “For the Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son.”
 - on the one hand, this is encouraging, because He can empathize with us
 - on the other hand, this is not a time to relax (there is never a time for that)
 - He has charged us to pick up our cross and follow Him; how are we doing?
 - we should judge ourselves before He judges us, and take advantage of the opportunity now to change and grow with Him leading us as King and Groom
 - we don’t want to see disappointment on His face on that day
 - ask God to speak through these verses in Leviticus about what areas He is opening up for us to work on in the coming seasons

- since Yeshua opens up the Scriptures after His resurrection (this time of year), ask for Him to do the same for us, especially regarding the mission He has for us in this life
 - as we look forward to a further empowering in regards to this mission at Pentecost

25 – Behar-Bechukotai – Transcript (not exact)

Hello and welcome to Beth Tikkun and this series called Spiritual Seasons. In this series, we are exploring how each Torah portion fits into the bigger pattern of salvation in the year. This week, we are in the double portion Behar-Bechukotai, Leviticus 25-27, which is the last three chapters of the book.

Before we get to the portion, let's spend a minute reviewing an idea from last week's teaching. In parsha Emor, we looked at how the second half of Leviticus starts building from the low place of the metzora, the leper, like we're climbing a mountain or climbing out of a pit. Right after the metzora we have the answer to our uncleanness, the Yom Kippur service, which is the center of the book of Leviticus. The answer to the separation of the metzora, who has to live outside the camp, is Yeshua's sacrifice and His presentation of His blood in the heavenly Holy of Holies as a covering for us.

From that point onward in Leviticus, the text emphasizes the idea of holiness, what holiness looks like. Some even call these chapters "the holiness code." Leviticus 19 contains an important verse in this regard. It reads: "Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them, You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy" (Leviticus 19:2). In the final chapter of Leviticus we see the word "kadosh" 12 times, though a couple of these are translated as "sanctuary" rather than "holy." These chapters of Leviticus are like God holding up a mirror to us and saying, "This is what you're really like on the inside; your essence is love for Me and for your neighbor." In the middle of this holiness picture we have Emor's focus on the critical roles of the priesthood and the appointed times in the life of holiness. These are both grand connecting points and are critical in the holy life. And this all leads us to this week's double portion, Behar-Bechukotai, where we're reaching the top of the holiness mountain.

Behar-Bechukotai Summary

"Behar" actually means "at" or "in" the mountain," and "Bechukotai" is usually translated "in My statutes." The two main topics in Behar, which is one long chapter, are the shmita year and the Jubilee. The shmita year is the 7th-year rest for the land in which crops are not sown or harvested, though the people can eat what comes up on its own. They just can't harvest the fields or vines all at once. Whatever comes up on its own or grows on the vines stays there for whoever or whatever wants to go get it. Elsewhere in the Torah we read about how debts to fellow Jews are canceled at this time, every seven years.

The Jubilee, which is the next topic, happens after seven shmita years, so seven cycles of seven; the 50th year, the year after these seven cycles are completed, is the special Jubilee year, the Yovel. “Yovel” is the word for a ram’s horn trumpet. On the Day of Atonement in the 50th year, Israel is to sound the shophar and “proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants.” The verse continues, “It shall be a jubilee for you, when each of you shall return to his property and each of you shall return to his clan” (Leviticus 25:10). When the Jubilee is announced, if you had to sell the right to work your land, that right is returned to you so that you can now work your own land again. Additionally, Hebrew servants are released. Now, the 7th year shmita involves forgiveness of debt, but the 50th-year Jubilee is greater, when servants are released and properties are returned.

Other topics in Behar include treatment of the poor and redemption of a poor person.

The last two chapters of Vayikra are portion Bechukotai. Chapter 26 contains blessings for walking in Adonai’s statutes and curses incurred if we spurn His commandments. The blessings and curses seem to be why the haftarah in Jeremiah was chosen to accompany this portion, as the haftarah also has blessings and curses. In the last chapter of Vayikra, chapter 27, we have laws of vows that require the valuation of people, the valuation of clean and unclean animals, and valuation of houses and fields.

Placing Behar

Let’s do some work now to place these portions in the flow of the calendar and the preceding portions. We already mentioned the idea that these portions are bringing us to the top of a portrait of holiness. God is extending this picture to us in preparation for a new work in us at Shavuot. He’s inviting us to see how we’re doing, how we’re measuring up. He’s running through a checklist to help us see what areas are still particularly missing the mark. He’s helping us get excited for our next meeting with Him.

Let’s ask now what the shmita year and the Jubilee have to do with reaching the top of the mountain, like the name “Behar” implies, “in the mountain,” or most translations say, “on the mountain.” Let’s start talking about this mountaintop by realizing that Behar is the thirty-second portion. R’Alon Anava says that for this reason, some call Behar the “heart” of the Torah because 32 is the number of “lev,” “heart.” So, what is this “heart” of the Torah? Again, Behar is only one long chapter dealing with the shmita, the Jubilee, and kindness to the poor: supporting a brother who becomes poor; not charging interest on a loan to a brother; if a brother becomes too poor and must sell himself, don’t make him a slave but allow him to be a servant until the Jubilee; if a brother sells himself to a foreigner, he may be redeemed, bought out of that situation, and if he’s not redeemed, he and his children are released in the year of Jubilee.

What do you do when you get to the top of a mountain? You do two things: first, you stop, you rest, and second, you take in the view, the higher perspective, the perspective from above. Let me suggest that these two ideas are also the emphasis of shmita and Jubilee. First of all, both

are obviously about rest. The shmita year is a year of rest for the land but also for the farmer, who can rest from working the land. The Jubilee year is not also about rest: the rest that comes with freedom from servitude, the rest that comes when the weight of difficulties are lifted off one's shoulders. Jubilee is also a year of rest for the land. So, at the time of the Jubilee, the farmers will actually not work the land for two full years, the 49th year being a shmita, and the 50th being the Jubilee.

We work with the goal in mind of a rest to come. We do not work for the sake of work. We understand that the fullness of life means that we have taken full advantage of the time given to us to acquire and shape and become so that we can enter into the reward of rest with God, having attained a depth of relationship with God through all of that work. We enter into the rest of the Bride.

Beyond rest, how are the shmita and Jubilee about a higher perspective or a reoriented perspective? This idea is mostly focused on Jubilee. In the parsha, there's much about calculating the value of service or land based on the number of years until the Jubilee. In other words, if a person has sold himself into servitude, he can pay his way out if he reimburses his master for the number of years of service left until the year of Jubilee, at which point he would have been able to go free. If it's 10 years to the Jubilee, and I want to go free now, I have to pay my master for 10 years of my labor. And it's the same with redeeming back the use of one's land.

The law of the Jubilee changes our perspective radically. It means that we can never permanently sell ourselves or our land. It means that the default position is that I am both a free person and a landowner, and land was the source of most wealth. Any fall from that position is only temporary. It means that my essential identity is free. Selling yourself as a servant can only be done with the day of freedom in mind. One eye is always on the next approaching Jubilee. Life is re-cast from "I'm stuck, I'm trapped, I'm constricted, I'm a slave and not my own," to "I'm free, even if I might temporarily find myself in servitude."

It reminds me of the way Shabbat can start to reorient our perspective on the week. In Jewish thinking, the first six days are named according to their relationship to Shabbat. Sunday is one day to the next Shabbat. Monday is the second day to Shabbat, and so on. Everything is looking toward the Shabbat. If you get really good at it, you'll arrange your week such that everything is ready for Shabbat: maybe invite people for erev Shabbat by Tuesday, shop for Shabbat on Wednesday, clean the house on Thursday, cook on Friday – something like that. My point is that the worship and study and rest and relationship of Shabbat become the center point about which the other days arrange themselves. And this is what the Jubilee does for a person's time of servitude and the sale of one's land, two of the most important aspects of life. The forgiveness of debts every seven years also reorients humanity's perspective on loans, which is another big part of life.

When life is just working to stay alive, it becomes tedious and life-draining. But when our perspective is reoriented toward working toward a resting in Him, a resting with our Creator and the Lover of our souls, that's a very different experience.

One way the Jubilee can help to reorient our perspective is in the knowledge that God has made allowance for us to be freed from the consequences of the poor decisions we may have made or the poor decisions others made that have affected us. In God, through the Messiah, we bid goodbye to that person who made those decisions. Gone. He's gone. She's gone. You may be dealing with some practical issues related to those decisions now, but get your perspective right: inwardly, you are already at the Jubilee. You are already free. Stop beating yourself up over those mistakes. Our God is a God Who wipes the slate clean now and then. And count yourself rich. The riches you carry away with you from that place of confinement are vast. You take away with you a kind of humility and a willingness to forgive others as you have been forgiven. You take with you the ability to reach others still stuck in that place from which you have been freed. God has placed limits on the fall. He has limited how long we are allowed to fall into constriction. He has limited the reach of the world. The ways of the world are passing away. I know they seem strong and seem to be getting stronger by the day, but these are just stages leading to the rest for the world that is coming, the seventh millennium when the Messiah will reign from Jerusalem.

This idea of reorienting our perspective is one of the benefits of studying the calendar and God's plan for our growth in Him, by the way. By studying the calendar, we see the goals, the milestones, each season is aiming toward. The year becomes more than time passing and our bodies getting older until we die. We see that we're attaining new levels of maturity, and each of those levels brings a deeper level of rest.

Standing Apart from the Ways of the World

The shmita and the Jubilee are very different from the ways of the world. There's a stark contrast here between God's ways and man's ways. There's a word that is used repeatedly in this chapter that speaks to us of the ways of the world. The word in Hebrew is "perek," or "b'parek." It's sometimes translated as "ruthless" or "harsh" or "severe." God says three times in this Behar chapter, "Do not rule over each other ruthlessly." Ruthlessness is, indeed, the way of the world. People get fired unfairly all the time. Companies turn a blind eye to how their products get produced by grinding workers into the ground, or they don't care that their products are hurting people. "Not my problem" is the way of the world. "I can't afford to get involved" is the way of the world. "Dog eat dog" is the way of the world. God says, "THAT MIGHT BE THEIR WORLD, BUT IT'S NOT YOUR WORLD."

I watched a good bit of the coronation of the new king and queen of Great Britain, and I was fascinated, and it also made me think of this portion in a couple of ways. It's a marvel to see such an elaborate ceremony having survived into the twenty-first century. Everything about it was the best that a people had to offer in that moment, and that's such a lovely thing to see – that many people doing their absolute best all together with such order and precision. The guests arrived in their perfectly fitted suits and dresses. The soldiers' uniforms were

immaculate, the horses perfectly decked out. The ceremony, itself, was flawless. Everything was arranged perfectly.

But I couldn't help but notice how the modern world was impinging in a sad sort of way on this moment. King Charles III and Queen Camila seemed rather boxed in, very much tied to the script, not just literally but to the point that they had to very carefully maintain their facial expressions, a kind of blank look. There was hardly a smile. On the one hand, this is very appropriate for the moment, which was quite solemn and had certain legal formalities that had to be done with accuracy. But on the other hand, a king brings a personality to his service of the nation, and this is partly God-given.

The unfortunate truth is that if the King and Queen had dared to allow their own personalities to show a bit more, there would have been a thousand critics jumping up to tear them down instantly. This is the ruthless way of our world more than ever, this critical spirit. So the weight of literally billions of judges sits on these two peoples' shoulders in that moment. They know that any deviation will be criticized harshly by someone who thinks they know better.

This lack of generosity to our fellow man has never been more true in human history than now, when technology has brought the world together as never before, when a billion people can watch a coronation. It has made a fallen world move even more in the direction of its fallenness. In a way, it's maybe part of God allowing the fallen world to experience itself to its greatest degree. And the venom pours in from every corner. We jump to criticize, and we have whole industries who love to criticize and who don't make money unless they are criticizing. And so in an environment like this, what is best for the new king and queen is to simply be statues – give the critics as little fodder as possible to work with. And it's a shame.

Grant spends some time in his parsha seasonings video this week dwelling on a special word from chapter 26, the word "keri." (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZueY3wKW_PY 15m). One place it's used is verses 23-24, where God is in the midst of describing the curses and punishments for not walking according to His commandments. The passage might be translated as, "And if by this discipline you are not turned to Me but walk casually with Me, then I also will walk casually with you, and I Myself will strike you sevenfold for your sins" (Leviticus 26:23-24). Grant says that God uses this word "keri" to say, "If you treat me as an afterthought, I'm going to likewise fill your life with an abundance of coincidence, catastrophic coincidence." Basically, you'll say, "I can't believe this event happened to follow this event which then made this other thing happen, and now everything's a mess." If we obstinately set our path in a contrary way, He'll take that same path and twist it so hard that we are undone. And at that point of undoing is our chance to humbly bend the knee and submit to Him and His ways.

That's what's happening in our world today. God is taking that obstinate path and absolutely twisting it to its bitter end, its comical end. And the world is tearing itself to pieces. And in truth, none of us are without blood on our teeth. We are treating each other harshly, and this has become normal for us. And I'm convicted myself in saying these things.

We can do better. As God twists the path of the world into itself, let's hold ourselves far, far away from that. We must protect ourselves against this spirit of criticism that has taken hold of our world. When it comes to matters of truth, we are uncompromising and even vocal. In other areas, give a person the benefit of the doubt. Build up where you can. Watch for the good and praise it. Rather than tearing down and hindering someone's work, speak positively if you can. In doing that, you aid the person in their work and help to bring out their better qualities. Pull away from the critical spirit that is energizing the world today and causing so much anxiety, especially in the younger generations. No one bears up well under constant criticism. Let the world tear itself apart if it must, but we Believers need to step away from that as much as possible. In the end, it's not our battle. Again, we do stand for truth. We speak up for truth. But there's a way to do that that does not stoop to the level of the world, which is sinking like a stone in murky waters.

A second thought I had while watching the coronation had to do with wealth, a caution about wealth. Let me be quick to say I don't think there's anything wrong with using a great display of wealth to crown a king – that seems good, actually. But seeing all of that just made me think about other ways wealth tends to accumulate in certain places in a ruthless world. But it was actually amazing to see. The new king was given two staves, one of which had a giant clear stone at the top. I thought it could be a diamond, but what a diamond! So I looked it up. That staff is called the "Sovereign's Sceptre with Cross," and at the top of it sits the Cullinan 1, also called the Star of Africa, the largest uncolored cut diamond in the world at 530 carats. The coronation ceremony involved many pounds of gold and silver – the king's crown itself has a nearly five pound solid gold frame. Altogether, the coronation regalia contain more than 23,000 diamonds, sapphires, rubies and emeralds. Beyond the Cullinan diamonds, we saw the 104-carat Stuart Sapphire and the 170 carat Black Prince's Ruby (which is actually a spinel). I was particularly transfixed by the enormous twin amethysts decorating the silk robes of the Archbishop of Canterbury (*Morse clasp from the Archbishops' cope* - <https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/47059>). I really enjoyed seeing all these treasures. And, again, I'm not saying that in this situation there was anything wrong with this display of the best the mines and miners of the world have to offer. This is how the ceremonial head of state for 15 countries is honored.

But the caution here can be applied to other ways that wealth tends to accumulate in a few hands. In our ruthless world-based systems like capitalism, wealth tends to pile up in just a few hands, and this is not good for anyone. The Bible is not silent on this issue, and Behar is ground zero for what the Torah has to say about it.

The way of the world is that the wealthy tend to get wealthier. Once the scales tip in a certain direction, once certain people, certain nations, certain families, certain companies get the upper hand, they tend to do whatever it takes to keep their position at the top, and they now have the resources to stay on top. They usually simply consume every other competitor, and the wealth gets more and more concentrated. We could maybe call this the "survival of the fittest." It's very natural, but it's not a SUPERNATURAL way to live, and the Torah is about living in a supernatural way. Again, it's simply not healthy that a handful of powerful companies

control the wealth of a nation. When the top 1% of Americans control 1/3 of the money, we've tipped into imbalance. It's especially unhealthy for those at the top.

At the heart of God and His Torah is the idea that the bigger guys look out for the little guys and do what they can to lift up the little guys. I'm not talking about redistribution of wealth by force, which would be communism. I'm talking about a little less focus on making money at all costs and a little more focus on being there to pick someone up when they step wrong from a heart of love. I'm not talking about impersonal, unending handouts that end up crippling people. Sometimes real love is cutting off the spigot. But I'm saying that the wealthy shouldn't try to cling with all their might to the wealth; be generous, and let God decide the fate of your fortunes. He has just loaned it to you anyway.

I'm really not trying to make a political statement here. But there are some clear guidelines here in the Torah for how wealth is to flow through a society and for making a way for people to start over, and it seems to me that there's not a country on earth today that is coming near to it. The fact is that this portion clearly shows that near the heart of the Torah is a great reset built into the fabric of the universe called the Jubilee, and we see the same idea reflected in a smaller way in the shmita, when every seven years debts are forgiven. Our God is a God Who treasures it when we are generous with each other. Our God is a God Who graciously lets us start over and Who expects us to extend that grace to each other, too. Now and then He takes out a giant cosmic eraser, and He says, "Ok, you stumbled a bit. Don't worry. This is not the end. I'm going to erase that. Let's start over!" This is very different from credit card companies today that gouge people with 20% interest and will ruin them if they can't pay. That's evil. But we've come to accept this evil in our society today and in the world in general. We don't bat an eyelash at these giant companies charging often-times vulnerable people 20% interest. It's not normal. Normal is what we see in the Torah, which is the standard of normal. Normal is what we're seeing in portion Behar, near the apex of the central book of the Torah.

One of my points here today is to say that we need to question everything about what our world tells us is the normal way to function. We need to stay grounded in the Torah's version of reality, not become ground down by the world's way. Much of what happens in our world today is "perek;" it's ruthless, and we need to distance ourselves from it because God is twisting it now and maybe even amplifying it so that it will collapse in on itself, to expose evil for what it is. Now more than ever we need to separate from the world by being constantly drenched in the Torah perspective.

Placing Bechukotai

Let's switch our focus now to Bechukotai, the final two chapters of Vayikra. As we mentioned earlier, "Bechukotai" means "in My chok," "in My statutes," from the verse "If you walk in my statutes and observe my commandments and do them, then I will give you your rains in their season, and the land shall yield its increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit" (Leviticus 26:3-4). So the phrase is, "If you walk in my statutes." That's the subject of "Bechukotai," the life of walking in God's way. We see prominently in this portion the listing of blessings for following God's ways and the curses for not following them.

Immediately we can see that this title speaks to the summit of the mountain. The rest and peace of Behar are bound up with walking in God's ways. The path is leading us to this life of successfully walking in God's statutes because that is the only life of true rest.

There's much to say about how it is that walking in God's commandments is the way of life. Let me list a few layers here. The commandments keep us from enslavement to the flesh; they are freedom from our bodies ruling over us. On another level, the commandments are a mirror for us that helps us to see our true nature, which is love for God and our neighbors. On another level, the commandments are the terms of a marriage contract. By them, we are joined to God, and through them we even produce the fruit of that marriage.

He's promising us life. And what do we have to do? It's not that complicated: we need to trust Him and walk according to the commandments, which is our true nature anyway.

If it's so easy, why do we fail so much? It's usually fear. We're afraid that we will not be provided for if we don't do what the world does to provide for itself. Regarding fear, can I just encourage us to look death in the face and say, "Bring it. I don't fear you. I will follow God, and if I die doing that, then so be it. You will not rule my life because fearing you is no life at all."

If fear isn't our biggest driver away from God's commandments, then it's probably the pursuit of either glory or pleasure, both of which are lies. Worldly glory ends up in shame eventually – and how many have we seen who have acquired worldly glory who end up in the pit of shame. And worldly pleasure always turns out to be temporary. The end of that road is not pleasure but slavery and sickness and everything unpleasurable.

Beyond these thoughts about how walking with God in His ways is the only real life, the life at the summit, I've got two more quick points. The first is that this word "Bechukotai" is hinting not at simply following God's commandments but following them from a heart of love. We know that it's not enough to merely follow the letter of the law. When we do that, that which is meant for life becomes death for us. If we offer a sacrifice out of a superficial kind of religiosity, that is abhorrent to God. He wants our hearts.

So how do we see this idea of a deeper keeping of the commandments in the word "Bechukotai." It's in the idea that the root "chok" traces back to the root "chaqaq," which means "to engrave." Engraving goes deeper than mere writing. These aren't superficially understood and superficially performed statutes. I believe that this final portion in the book of Vayikra, this summit portion in the holiness code, is a reference to Torah written on the heart. The commandments are simply NOT life to us if they are not written on our hearts, being done from a heart of love for God. So, the REAL life we're aiming for, the real rest, comes when through the blood of Yeshua, the commandments are engraved on the heart. We call this the "New Covenant."

And we can see this heart of love expressed in the last chapter of Bechukotai, which deals with vows to the Lord that go beyond the requirements of the Torah. These are extra commitments a person would take on to express their HEART to God.

Now, what might be in someone's heart is love, and what might be there could also be fear, fear for God, which is not bad. Fear of the Lord has an important foundational place in the life of the Believer. Allowances are made for these vows, whatever the emotional context for them. You can imagine that if someone were deathly ill or in grave danger, let's say a child is critically ill, the parent may make a vow to the Lord in that moment that if the child is spared, the parent vows to pay to the Tabernacle an amount equivalent to the child's worth as a servant. In that way, the child is dedicated to the Lord through the silver, though the parent has not directly dedicated the child to the Lord. Directly dedicating the child, himself or herself, to the Lord would mean that the child would have to be brought to the Temple and given to the priests, like Samuel's parents brought Samuel to the Tabernacle. Provision is being made here for another way to carry through with such a vow because if a vow like that is made, it must be fulfilled. We cannot take a vow to the Lord lightly. Such a vow may also be taken for the value of an animal, a house, or a piece of land, and these valuations are listed in this chapter, as well.

There's more here to this topic of valuation being the final subject of Vayikra than the idea that these vows go beyond the letter of the law. It's not just about expressing a heart of love for God or a great fear of God. When we get to the end of it all, we are judged; in a way, we are valued. At the very top of the mountain comes judgment. The judgment is a step removed from life in the same way that this chapter is a bit separated from the rest of Leviticus in the text, itself. The previous chapter seems to end the commandments by saying, "These are the statutes and rules and laws that the LORD made between himself and the people of Israel through Moses on Mount Sinai" (Leviticus 26:46). That feels like an end point, but then chapter 27 is tacked on. I'm suggesting that one way to think of chapter 27 is that it is like the judgment that is tacked onto our life. There does come a point when our life is weighed on the scale, when a calculation of our life is made, a weighing of what we have done, what we have done for the Lord in our life, the time and money and effort we have dedicated to Him in service to Him. Our ultimate rescue is not dependent upon our works, but our reward IS dependent on our works. It's mind boggling to us, but in the end, a judgment will be made that fixes us with a certain description, the fixing of the final form. We have a certain opportunity here in this life to acquire a form, while we are in this shadowlands and have the great gift of free will. Will we acquire the form of a vessel yielded to Him through which He can pour His Spirit, or will we acquire a form that is blocked, uncircumcised, such that the Spirit cannot flow through us to do the work of the Lord? Will we be called a sheep or a goat? A pronouncement will be rendered in the end. And don't think that you're safe just because you seem to be doing better than most people around you. It doesn't work like that. Only God knows what He gave to each of us at the beginning of our journey, so we will be judged partly in accordance with that initial gift. To whom much is given, much is expected.

This idea of ultimate judgment is alluded to in the Brit Chadashah reading in Mathew 16, where Yeshua says, “For the Son of Man is going to come with His angels in the glory of His Father, and then He will repay each person according to what he has done” (Matthew 16:27).

Yeshua

Let’s turn our attention a bit more squarely on Yeshua now. Yeshua is ultimately our Judge. John 5:22 says, “For the Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son.” Yeshua lived on this earth like us, in human form. He can fully identify with our struggles. And this gives some comfort.

But let’s not relax too much in this knowledge that we will be judged by Yeshua. He has charged us to pick up our cross and follow Him. We are to imitate Him, and He went to the cross. Are we living up to that? How are we doing? Are we going to the cross like that?

I think this point in the year is not the time to feel comfortable where we’re at. We can never afford to do that, in fact. Knowing that Yeshua is our Judge should more than anything impel us in this season to JUDGE OURSELVES before we are judged by Him, to judge ourselves while we yet have time to work on ourselves, to walk with God, to be led by Yeshua in doing the work of becoming the people He has made us to be. We don’t want to get to that moment of judgement and see disappointment on Yeshua’s face. God forbid! Now is a time to ask for the light to pour in and illuminate the darkness within us once again so that we can go further up and further in, as C.S. Lewis put it. It’s a time to read through these portions focused on holiness in Leviticus and say to God, “Speak to me through these verses about how I’m falling short of holiness and how You would bring healing to my life in the seasons to come so that I can be a better vessel for You, for the glory of Your Name.”

As we talked about last time, we’re in that part of the calendar where Yeshua was appearing to the disciples after His death. One of the things He did before departing was to open their minds to understand the Scriptures, the revelation of a new kind of light. I think this act of Yeshua is connected in the calendar to the special day called Lag B’Omer, which is also connected to light and the start of a deeper understanding of Scripture. It would seem this deeper understanding for the disciples was in particular areas that they needed in that moment, including how the Scriptures foretold that He would suffer and die and rise on the third day and how the gospel of repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed throughout the world. Yeshua was opening the Scriptures to secure them in the faith and show them their mission regarding taking the gospel to the world. We, too, can pray in this time that through the Holy Spirit in us, Yeshua would open up the Scriptures to us in the ways that we need right now, especially in the ways that help us understand better our own mission in this world. This is a good time to focus on mission and to look forward to the fresh empowerment for fulfilling that mission that is coming at Pentecost. This empowerment, too, comes through Yeshua.

Yeshua will be our Judge, but until that day, He is our Leader, our King, our Groom. Let’s take full advantage of the time we have remaining to walk with Him, to be shaped by Him, before we reach that moment where our lives are weighed by Him.

Well, that's all for today. Thank you for listening. I'll post a link to an outline below the video. May God bless us to more and more fully enter into the rest of Yeshua. May more and more of our lives be oriented toward that rest. May we be a people who hold themselves far away from the ruthlessness of the world, and may we be a generous people. May God teach us to walk in His commandments with love. And may we rise up to be the people He has made us to be.

And as we say upon finishing a book of the Torah: "Chazak, chazak, v'nit chazek!" "Be strong, be strong, and may we be strengthened!"

Shalom.