

A Year of Encompassing Torah



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Parashat Bechukotai

May 24, 2008
19 Iyar 5768

35th Day of the Omer

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This is how we shall accrue our mitzvah points:

**Barukh atah Adonai,  
Eloheinu Melekh ha-Olam,  
Asher kidishanu b'mitzvotav  
v'tzivanu la'asok b'divrei torah...**

**Praised are You Adonai, our God,  
The Sovereign of all worlds,  
Who has made us holy with your mitzvot,  
And commanded us to engage ourselves  
with words of torah.**

***To be fully engaged with Torah  
Is to wrestle with Torah –  
To challenge our tradition while loving it,  
To question it while celebrating it.***

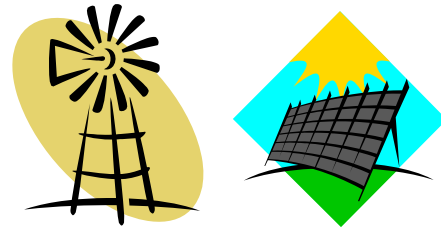
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An Added Blessing For Spiritual Direction

*"Yihyu l'ratzon imrey fi v'higion libi
lifaneycha Hashem Tzuri v'Go'ali*

May the expressions of my mouth
and **the thoughts of my heart**
find favor before You, G-d,
my Rock and my Redeemer."

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### Parashat Bechukotai 5768

#### Give It A Rest!

In the second paragraph of the Shema we are led to believe that our actions, both good and bad, will have a direct effect on the bounty of the land. In other words, if we obey the commandments, God will reward us with the right amount of rain in the proper seasons, and the earth will be productive. On the other hand, if we are to disobey God's commands, we can expect the land to go dry and famine will result. Similar warnings appear in both last week's Torah portion as well as the one for this week, in which we are instructed by God to give the land a rest.

There are those who would argue that the Torah is to be understood literally, that our actions have a direct effect upon God who governs the heavens. Given our current level of sophistication, there are a greater number who would agree that the Torah is to be understood in a more philosophical or metaphorical vein. God does not work in that way. However, that does not mean that human actions go without its consequences. We now know better than at any other time how human actions have affected the world on a global level, stripping the earth of precious elements, clearing forests for development, and sending endless streams of exhaust into the air, to name a few.

This year, the Reconstructionist Movement, in their study materials regarding the Counting of the Omer, have highlighted the efforts of individual congregations in preserving our environment. Last summer I had the opportunity to speak to the rabbi of a synagogue on the cape who was in negotiations with the neighbors to his building regarding the construction of a windmill which would produce enough energy for the synagogue and its

abutting neighbors. What prevents us from considering a similar plan to utilize our flat roof as a surface area to hold a series of sun panels to produce renewable energy for us and our own neighbors!?!

Although what I propose is simplistic in its approach, we all must realize that in order to reap the benefits of any idea that we propose to save money and more importantly not to exhaust certain resources, there is an investment that we all must make. In other words, we must be willing to plant the seeds for future generations – despite certain costs that may seem insurmountable in the present moment. We are told of a story in the Talmud about an influential person in the community of Israel who was sought out by communal leaders whenever there was a famine. Honi Hama'agal, Honi the Circle Maker, was credited with making it rain after a significant drought. In this particular story, a person found him planting a carob tree, which was strange since it takes approximately seventy years before these trees bear its fruit. So, he was asked why he bothered planting such a tree knowing that he would never benefit from it. Honi responded, just as my grandfather planted a tree for me, I plant for my own grandchildren. It is imperative that we think beyond ourselves if we are to have hope for the future.

Yet, there is something that is just as important as thinking ahead to tomorrow. And that is the notion that we must take of our needs for today. Another story regarding Honi Hama'agal records him planting when he is told that the Mashi'ach was waiting for him. Rather than interrupting his planting for someone of such great stature, Honi finished planting his tree before acknowledging the Mashi'ach.

Each new day we face a rise in the price of gasoline that fuels our cars and the price of numerous products that we purchase at the store because of delivery costs and production costs related to our dependence on oil. We are indeed paying a tremendous price for that dependence. How would our world change if we as a society honored the concept of giving the world a sabbatical from our perceived needs to consume that oil – and all that it represents? What sacrifices are we willing to make to do with less? Does that intellectual, and emotional, response fuel our ability to seek alternatives that

will ultimately limit our dependence? Maybe, just maybe, God has anticipated this crisis that we are experiencing – all be it in different terminology – and the Torah offers us a viable solution to our entanglement.

By making oil our God we have indeed caused ourselves to suffer. Our famine in this regard is certainly not a product of a lapsed observance. Rather it is a reflection of our inattentiveness to ourselves and our growing dependency for more. We have celebrated in its abundance. And we have been satisfied. All of this is good – when we recognize the source of our blessings. However, when we lose sight of that source is when begin to feel the hunger that comes with its withdrawal. God does not cut off the flow of blessings in this world. It is we, who have cut ourselves off from God by our insatiable appetites for more, without thinking about the need for rest. Even though the flow of oil may become diminished in time, God's flow of divine love, our spiritual abundance so to speak, will never dry up. When we discover our spiritual path in life, and follow along in that journey by devoting ourselves in service to our inner selves, to others, and to God – what we discover is that renewable source of energy that will bring us blessings.

In the spirit of Behar and Bechulkotai, let us take seriously the instructions of observing a sabbatical of the land and a release from bondage our vows to indenture others, by promising ourselves time – time to seek out new ways to fuel our synagogue's need for energy, to fuel our homes and the spiritual life of our families, to fuel the hunger that lies deep inside the core of inner beings. May we indeed prosper from those investments that we make as we all plant the seeds for new growth on this Shabbat, as individuals and as a community.

