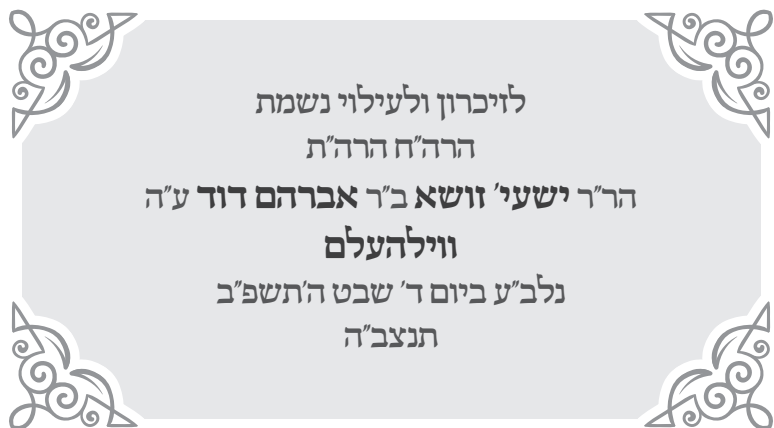


Behar-Bechukosai

THE WEISS EDITION

Light points

FROM THE TEACHINGS OF
THE LUBAVITCHER REBBE ON THE
WEEKLY TORAH PORTION



לזיכרון ולעילוי נשמת
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בהר

Behar

כה:א | 25:1

וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה בְּהַר סִינַי לֵאמֹר.

G-d spoke to Moshe on Mount Sinai, saying.

A Little Big

The Midrash relates that the great mountains of the world all vied to be chosen as the site where G-d would give the Torah to Bnei Yisrael. Nevertheless, G-d selected the smallest of all the mountains, Mount Sinai, teaching us the value of humility.¹

The question arises: Mount Sinai was indeed the smallest mountain, but it was still a mountain. If the Torah was to be given on a site that symbolized humility, why not choose a plain, or better yet, a valley? A valley is certainly more “humble” than even the smallest of mountains.

Evidently, humility was not the only quality sought for the site of the giving of the Torah; G-d desired to give the Torah on a mountain, albeit a small one.

1. Midrash Tehillim 68:17.

The paradoxical “small mountain” symbolizes that the Torah demands modesty, not meekness. Certainly, the primary criterion to receive the Torah is humility. This is emphasized in our Shmoneh Esrei prayers, where we precede the request for G-d to “open my heart in Your Torah” with the supplication “let my soul be like dust before all,” i.e., humility is the key to success in Torah study. At the same time, we should be proud of our observance of G-d’s will. As the Code of Jewish Law begins: “Do not be ashamed in the face of mockers.”² Meaning that a Jew must be confident and determined in his observance of the Torah, not fazed in the slightest by scorn or adversity.

The Torah was therefore given on Mount Sinai, the smallest of the mountains, but not in a plain or a valley, to teach us that humility and pride are *both* necessary in order to receive and implement the Torah: we must regard ourselves with humility, while being staunchly proud of our Torah lifestyle and mitzvah observance.

—*Likkutei Sichos, vol. 1, pp. 276–278*

2. Shulchan Aruch Admor Hazaken, Orach Chaim 1:1.

 כה:ב-ד | 25:2-4

כִּי תָבֹאוּ אֶל הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי נֹתֵן לָכֶם וְשָׁבַתָּה
 הָאָרֶץ שִׁבְתָּ לָּהּ. יֵשׁ שָׁנִים תִּזְרַע עֲדָה... וּבְשָׁנָה
 הַשְּׁבִיעִת שִׁבַת שְׁבַתוֹן יְהִיָּה לָאָרֶץ.

*When you come to the land that I am giving you, the
 land shall rest a Shabbos to G-d. For six years you may
 sow your field... but in the seventh year, the land shall
 have a complete rest.*

Goal-Oriented

The seven-year agricultural cycle observed in the Land of Israel begins with six years of work, followed by a year of Shemittah, a Sabbatical year. Yet when the Torah introduces the commandment of Shemittah, it opens with the statement “When you come to the land... the land shall rest a Shabbos to G-d,” which gives the impression that the year of rest is at the start of the seven-year cycle, even before the six years of work begin.

The Alter Rebbe explains that the Torah writes it this way to teach us that the upcoming Shemittah year must be the underlying motivation during the first six years of work.³ In other words, we must establish our six years of working the land on the ideal that our ultimate goal is the seventh year, which is “Shabbos to G-d,” when our freedom from agricultural labor will allow us devote our time to purely holy pursuits, such as extensive Torah study. This awareness must pervade our attitude and conduct throughout the years of work, and

3. Likkutei Torah, Behar 40d.

will thereby ensure that our seventh year is *truly* sanctified, and provided for by G-d (in advance) with an abundance of material blessing, too.

The Shemittah cycle that Bnei Yisrael began observing when they settled the Land of Israel serves as a model for the individual “lands” we each establish—i.e., the homes we build and the families we raise. Jewish parents might spend the bulk of their day doing tasks that seem mundane—identical to those performed in a non-Jewish home. Nevertheless, the mitzvah of Shemittah teaches us that from the very get-go, when a child is born, the goal in a Jewish home must be to raise this child to be “Shabbos-like,” free to grow and thrive in Judaism and holiness, with no concern for the material. As a result, even the everyday tasks of parenthood will not be the same. Our “Shabbos objective” will be evident in every aspect of how we raise our families, and we will merit that our children will grow up to be truly “Shabbos-like”—devoted entirely to G-d, and provided for by Him with abundant goodness and prosperity.

—*Likkutei Sichos, vol. 12, pp. 247-250*

בחוקותי

Bechukosai

כ"ג | 26:3

אם בְּחֻקְתֵי תֵלְכוּ וְאֶת מִצְוֹתַי תִּשְׁמְרוּ וְעֲשִׂיתֶם אֹתָם.

If you follow My statutes, and observe My commandments and perform them.

When the Going Gets Tough

Rashi wonders about the meaning of the phrase “If you follow My statutes.” We might assume it refers to mitzvah observance, but that is mentioned in the next phrase, “and observe My commandments.” What, then, is the meaning of the command to “follow G-d’s statutes”? Rashi concludes that it must refer to the study of Torah—“to toil in Torah.”

Rashi’s assertion that following G-d’s statutes requires not only studying the Torah, but also *toiling* in it, is supported by the verse’s unusual reference to Torah study with the term *bechukosai*, “in My statutes.”

The Torah generally uses the term *chok*, “statute,” in reference to mitzvos that have no logical explanation. The observance of these commandments is naturally toilsome on an

emotional level, as it takes great sacrifice for a logical person to act in a manner that defies rationality and explanation. As such, the term *chok* is virtually synonymous with challenge and difficulty.

So, when used in the context of Torah study, Rashi understands the term *chok* as a reference to Torah study that is challenging and toilsome, such as devotedly studying Torah even when we do not derive satisfaction and enjoyment from our studies. For to “follow My statutes” means to not only study the Torah, but “to toil in Torah.”

—*Toras Menachem, vol. 25, pp. 292–293*

 כו:ג | 26:3

אם בְּחֻקֹּתַי תֵּלְכוּ וְאֶת מִצְוֹתַי תִּשְׁמְרוּ.

*If you follow My statutes and observe
My commandments.*

The Art of Carving

The term *chok*, statute, has a number of meanings. In the context of Torah study, Rashi interprets the phrase “If you follow my statutes” as a requirement to “*toil* in Torah.” Generally, however, the Torah uses the term *chok* in reference to mitzvos that have no logical explanation. As well, the word *chok* is associated in Likkutei Torah¹ with the Hebrew word for engraving, חֻקִּיקָה, *chakikah*.

These three definitions are related. One of the obvious differences between writing and engraving is that writing requires minimal physical effort, whereas carving in stone (or other hard surfaces) is physically strenuous. Engraving is therefore a metaphor for observing the mitzvos that defy logic, which is naturally a greater challenge than adhering to the commandments whose purpose we do understand. Similarly, in the context of Torah study, the term *bechukosai*, “in My statutes,” refers to *laboring* in the study of Torah—in Rashi’s words, “to toil in Torah.”

The metaphor of engraving also encapsulates the impact that laboring in the study of Torah has on the individual. Just as a hard surface, such as stone, can be engraved with persistent toil, even the most unmoved and hardened heart

1. Bechukosai 45a.

can be softened and inspired through diligent Torah study. As Rabbi Akiva famously remarked upon observing a stone that had been gouged by the consistent dripping of water, “If soft water can carve solid stone, how much more can the iron word of G-d penetrate the fleshy human heart.”²

—*Likkutei Sichos, vol. 17, pp. 318–319*

2. Avos D'Rabbi Nasan, chapter 6.

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