

**LIGHT
FROM
THE
FUTURE**

**PARSHAS BEHAR-
BECHUKOSAI**

BY

HESCHEL GREENBERG

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS BEHAR
BECHUKOSAI

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ESSAYS ON PARSHAS BEHAR-
BECHUKOSAI

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**LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS BEHAR
BECHUKOSAI**

**Dedicated to the Lubavitcher Rebbe, who,
more than any Jewish leader, has prepared
us for Moshiach and the imminent
Redemption**

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BECHUKOSAI**

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B"H

INTRODUCTION

The following collection of essays on *parshas Behar-Bechikosai* was taken from the weekly Torah messages that I have been sending to hundreds of individuals over the past 22 years.

These messages were written in the spirit of the talks of the Lubavitcher Rebbe. Several of them are actually based on or adaptations of his essays and discourses on the parsha.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe declared that we are living in unique times. He applied the words of the Midrash to our day:

“The time of your Redemption has arrived.”

The Rebbe stated further that the straightforward way for us to bring about the actual Redemption is by learning what the Torah says about Moshiach and Redemption. While learning Torah in general has the capacity to change our mindset, learning about Moshiach and Redemption has the capacity to alter of

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exile-constrained way of thinking and cultivating a liberating manner of thinking.

In this spirit, each one of these messages concludes with an application of the Torah lesson of that week to our understanding of Moshiach and Redemption, as well as to help us prepare for the coming of Moshiach and the imminent Redemption.

It is my fervent hope that these essays will contribute to the process of changing our *galus/exile* mindset into a Moshiach mindset, which is effected by the study of these themes in Torah.. And may this effort contribute to the imminent Redemption through our righteous Moshiach. Amen.

* * *

The parsha of Behar deals with, the Jubilee year and related subjects; laws that can only be observed in the Messianic Era when all Jews will live in the Land of Israel.

Bechokosai is connected to the subject of Redemption in a very open way. It discusses the events of the future such as the elimination of war and the nature of wild beasts among other predictions that are all connected to the Messianic Era.

ESSAY ONE

THE DOUBLE RETURN OF THE LAND

There is only one land and one people who
enjoy a symbiotic relationship.

That is the people and the Land of Israel.

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ESSAY ONE

THE DOUBLE RETURN OF THE LAND

The Sabbath of Sabbaths

This parsha opens with the laws concerning the Sabbatical year known as *Shemittah*. Every seven years, the Torah requires that the land in Israel remain fallow. One may not sow or reap the produce of the seventh year.

There are several anomalies about the manner in which the Torah introduces and characterizes the Sabbatical year.

First, in the introductory verse the Torah states:

“When you come to the Land that I am giving you, the Land shall rest a Sabbath to G-d.”

This seems to suggest that the Land must rest for the first year after the Jews arrive there. The question has been raised, how could the Torah state that when they come to the Land, the land must rest? The year of resting does

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not commence until the seventh year as the Torah explicitly states in the very next verse. The Torah should have stated instead that “when you come to the Land you shall count six years and the seventh year the Land shall rest a Sabbath to G-d.”

Second, in a subsequent verse the Torah states:

But in the seventh year, the Land shall have a complete rest, a Sabbath to G-d...

The term for “complete rest” in Hebrew is the repetitive expression “Shabbos Shabboson-Sabbath of Sabbaths.”

The use of this dual expression—Shabbos Shabboson—is, however, problematic. Why not just the single term Shabbos?

Moreover, the introductory verse cited above, in fact, uses the singular expression of Shabbos. Why does the Torah then use the double expression in the very next verse?

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Super Sabbaths

When we analyze the usage of the singular and dual expression of Shabbos in other parts of the Torah it appears that the double expression does not fit in with the laws of the Sabbatical year.

To explain:

The term Shabbos is used in multiple contexts. We have the weekly Shabbos, as well as all the major Jewish Holidays, which are also called Shabbos. There is one difference, however, between the weekly Shabbos and all but one of the Holidays: The weekly Shabbos is sometimes referred to as Shabbos Shabboson-the Sabbath of Sabbaths, as is Yom Kippur.

The difference between the single use of the term Shabbos and the dual expression of Shabbos Shabboson is that a Jewish Holiday is only a partial day of rest. The Torah allows certain forms of work involved in food preparation such as cooking (from an existing flame) etc. On Shabbos and Yom Kippur, however, one must desist from **all** forms of work, including food preparation. Hence these

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Holy Days are given the dual appellation: Shabbos Shabboson—the Sabbath of Sabbaths. While Holidays are called Shabbos, these other days are Shabbos Shabboson—the Sabbath of Sabbaths.

In light of this introduction, the usage of Shabbos Shabboson with regard to the Sabbatical year is problematic. The restrictions of the Sabbatical year are far fewer than those of Shabbos. Indeed, even the Holidays are more restrictive and demand greater rest than the Sabbatical year. Why then is it characterized as Shabbos Shabboson?

The following is an answer to these questions, based on the 20th Century work *Ateres Tzvi* (published in 1953 with letter of blessing by the Previous Lubavitcher Rebbe). *Ateres Tzvi* sheds light on the uniqueness of *Eretz Yisrael*—the Land of Israel, which explains the use of Shabbos Shabboson.

A Holy Land: An Oxymoron?

According to the Zohar, *Eretz Yisrael* is fundamentally different from all other

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countries; it is “Eretz Hakodesh-the Holy Land.” How can a land be holy? When something is totally removed from the norm, the mundane, the weekday or the conventional, it is said to be holy. We can easily appreciate how a certain physical structure can be holy because it has been consecrated for the service of G-d, exclusively. The Bais Hamikdash fits that description well because it had a sanctified singular purpose.

We can even understand how a city like Jerusalem could be given the designation of “holy.” It is a confined area in close proximity to the Holiest spot on Earth. Moreover, because of its proximity to the Bais Hamikdash, it demanded certain modes of behavior appropriate for such a location. In Jerusalem, one could breathe the holy atmosphere that pervaded the entire city.

But, how could we designate an entire country as a Holy Land?

The answer is provided by the Torah (Deuteronomy 11:12) which describes the Land of Israel thus:

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A land which G-d your G-d, cares about. The eyes of G-d A-mighty are continuously upon it, from the beginning of the year to the end of the year.

The question can be raised, doesn't G-d watch over all countries of the world?

According to the Zohar, there is a fundamental difference between the way G-d supervises other places and the way He looks upon Eretz Yisroel: G-d supervises all the other lands through His "ministers" and angels, whereas G-d Himself watches over the Land of Israel.

Likewise the Jewish nation is a holy nation, a nation apart, and is not in any way influenced by any intermediary forces such as angels. Our link with G-d is direct. Hence, the Land of Israel cannot possibly be controlled by any other nation. Indeed, no other nation can even successfully colonize our Land, as history has demonstrated. Upon the exile of the Jewish nation, the Land of Israel was transformed from a Land of Milk and Honey to a veritable wasteland of uninhabitable desert and swamps. That is how the Land remained until

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the Jewish people repopulated it in recent times.

Prior to the conquest of the Land by Yehoshua, the seven Canaanite tribes occupied it. That was an anomalous and aberrant situation. The Land's rightful inhabitants and proprietors had not arrived yet; the Land itself could well be said to have been in exile too. The Canaanite occupation was a foreign subjugation. It was akin to someone appropriating and then trying to wear clothing tailor-made for someone else. No matter how hard one tries to make it fit the contours of his or her body, it stubbornly remains ill fitting.

When the Jews entered the Land, it was not really a conquest; it was actually the return of the Land to its rightful owners. We did not take it away from anyone; it was never really theirs to begin with. The Land of Israel cannot be conquered and thus transformed into another nation's territory. Unlike any other land on Earth, the Land of Israel has an intrinsic, immutable connection to a specific people, the people of Israel.

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Shabbos: The Return of the Land

We can now understand why the Torah begins the discussion of the Sabbatical year with the words “When you come to the Land that I am giving you, the Land shall rest a Sabbath to G-d.” We earlier asked how the Torah could state that when you come to the land it shall rest? Doesn’t the cycle of resting only begin in the seventh year? However, in light of the above we see that the word Shabbos-rest can also be rendered “return.” And this is what the Torah is saying: When you will come to the Land, it will have **returned** to its rightful owners. With their arrival the Land of Israel becomes liberated Land. All of its potential is now ready to be actualized.

The Torah then continues: If during the seventh year you will rest, then there will be a Shabbos Shabboson, i.e., a double return of the land:

The first return was the mere presence of the Jewish people in their G-d given Land, which revealed the Land’s integrity.

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The second return was the **recognition** of the Land's unique status by desisting from work upon it during the seventh year.

By observing these restrictions, the Jewish people demonstrated that they understood their intrinsic relationship with the Land. They continue to understand and demonstrate that it is not their land by virtue of conquest, possession or international law. It is theirs because, like Am Yisrael-the Jewish people themselves, Eretz Yisrael is uniquely and exclusively governed and supervised by G-d, as opposed to all other lands which are governed through intermediary angels.

Two Stages of the Messianic Age

The concept of the duality of the return of the Land—first through entering into it and then observing the Sabbatical Year requirements—can also be applied to our return to the Land of Israel with the imminent arrival of Moshiach and the ensuing Redemption.

As long as we are in the period of exile, the connection we have to the Land of Israel remains tenuous. Every day we hear our right

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to the Land challenged and denied. Israel's physical security is still a troubling major issue.

The first step in the process of the "return" of the Land to us is what Maimonides describes as Moshiach "fighting the wars of G-d." These wars are intended to liberate Israel from all the external threats that undermine its security and the connection of the Jewish people to the Land.

This process represents the first "Shabbos" or return of the Land, by cementing and reinforcing our absolute and permanent connection to it. Even in this first stage of return, Israel's connection to the Jewish people will never be challenged again. The entire world will appreciate and accept the reality that Israel the People and Israel the Land are inseparable.

The next step for Moshiach will be to build the Third Temple and then gather all of Israel the People and bring them home to Israel the Land. At that time all of the laws that could not be observed during the past Exile will become operable again, especially the laws of

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the Sabbatical and Jubilee years, discussed in this week's parsha.

That stage will represent the second phase of return—the “Shabbos Shabboson”—when Israel's integrity will be fully restored and it will become manifestly clear to all that our connection to the Land is validated by our commitment to following all of the commandments associated with it.

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ESSAY TWO

THE PRICE OF FISH AND MOUNT SINAI

Whatever it is we do, there is one question we
should be asking:

“What is the connection of anything and
everything we do with Mount Sinai?”

Everything we do should be evaluated in
terms of its relationship to the ideal of Mount
Sinai.

The value of each and every experience should
be measured by its ability to express the ideal
of Mount Sinai.

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ESSAY TWO

THE PRICE OF FISH AND MOUNT SINAI

Connections

What does this week's parsha have to do with the price of fish?

Well, there is no known connection between them. But a similar question has been raised by Rashi concerning the way the Torah begins this week's parsha:

G-d spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai, saying: speak to the children of Israel saying: When you come to the Land that I am giving you, the Land should rest a Sabbath to G-d...

The question that Rashi raises here is:

What is the connection between the sabbatical year and Mount Sinai?

In other words, why did the Torah stress that **this** commandment in particular was given at

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Sinai, considering the fact that **all** of the commandments were given at Sinai? Yet, the Torah does not mention that fact explicitly regarding all the other commandments; only this one concerning the sabbatical year.

In this essay we will focus not on Rashi's answer, but on his question.

This phrase Rashi uses to formulate his question, "What is the connection of the Sabbatical year to Mount Sinai?" has been popularized in rabbinic literature and has the connotation of "what connection is there between two things that appear to be unrelated." Whenever we confront two themes that are juxtaposed that do not seem to have a thematic connection, the rabbis will employ that phrase, "What is the connection of the Sabbatical year to Mount Sinai?" no matter what the topics are.

Some have wondered why the question is phrased as, "What is the connection of the Sabbatical year to Mount Sinai?" It should have been phrased as "What is the connection of Sinai to the Sabbatical year?" After all, it is the mention of Mount Sinai in the context of

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the laws of the Sabbatical year that seems to be out of place.

An Existential Question We Should Always be Asking.

In truth, this phrase—especially the way it is worded—can be said to go beyond the specific discussion of the Sabbatical year. It can be understood as a lesson to us in every aspect of our lives. We should always hear that question reverberating in our ears. Whatever it is we do, there is one question we should be asking: “What is the connection of anything and everything we do with Mount Sinai?”

Everything we do should be evaluated in terms of its relationship to the ideal of Mount Sinai. The value of each and every experience should be measured by its ability to express the ideal of Mount Sinai.

What is the ideal of Mount Sinai? And why must everything we do revolve around it?

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The Sinai Ideal

First and foremost, Mount Sinai is the location at which history's most momentous event took place.

It is the singular event that gave meaning and purpose to all the other events that have happened before and after the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai. Without Sinai, the world would not have a reason to exist. When G-d created the world, our Sages tell us, G-d made a stipulation: If the Jews will accept the Torah, then the world will continue to exist; if not, then the world would revert back to its original state of nothingness.

When we go to work—the theme of the Sabbatical year as the Torah states in this week's parsha “For six years you may sow your fields...”—we must ask ourselves, “What does my work have in common with Mount Sinai?”

Similarly, when we go on our vacation—again, the theme of this week's parsha: “but in the seventh year, the Land should have a complete rest...”—we must ask the same question of ourselves. “What does my vacation have to do

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with Sinai? How does the event of Mount Sinai inform my vacation? And the same must be asked about everything we do.

The Sinai Attitude of Mountain Climbing

More specifically, Mount Sinai is not just the location where history's most pivotal event took place, it is also emblematic of the attitude a Jew must have in his or her life. Judaism demands that we approach every aspect of our lives with the Mount Sinai ideal.

A mountain represents the ideal of climbing. A Jew cannot stay in one place as it pertains to his or her spiritual life. Just as most "normal" people want to climb the ladder of material success, we must always view every opportunity in life as a means to climb Mount Sinai; to grow in our knowledge of Torah and the observance of its commandments.

Most people who start off living in a one room apartment aspire to the American Dream of owning their own little house. But it doesn't stop there. The average person strives to climb even higher on the ladder of success and moves to a larger and fancier house.

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This natural tendency to strive for more success is actually rooted in the soul's experience of Mount Sinai. As we are taught, every Jew's soul stood at the foot of Mount Sinai, and at that time the desire to "climb mountains" was embedded in the psyche of each and every Jew.

If we lack familiarity with the Sinai experience—the memory of which is etched in the souls of every Jew—we will confine our ambition and "mountain climbing" skills for mundane matters. If, however, we are able to hear the sounds of the soul, we will utilize our desire to climb for the existential and spiritual aspects of life.

Not All Mountains were Created Equal

But, it is not enough to approach every aspect of life in terms of how it assists us in climbing our own mountains. It must also be a specific mountain, for not all mountains were created equal. It must be Mount Sinai. Even our desire for spiritual growth has to be informed and qualified by the specific Mount Sinai experience.

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What is it about Mount **Sinai** that informs our lives and its experiences?

One basic lesson is derived from the fact that Sinai was the lowest mountain in the region. We should not get carried away with our ability to climb to the greatest heights; it should not go to our heads. We must always maintain a sense of humility. No matter how high one's climbs they have to always be able to relate to everyone.

Precursor to Redemption

The experience of Sinai—the seminal Chassidic work, the Tanya, teaches us—was the precursor to the ultimate Redemption, at which time, the process begun then will become a permanent and all pervasive reality.

Translating that in the context of our discussion this means that in the Messianic Age we will achieve the goal of scaling the greatest spiritual heights without the attendant feeling of smugness and arrogance that often goes along with a person's great achievements.

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The role model for such a balanced—Mount Sinai—attitude was Moses who, despite his exalted level, was also the most humble person that ever lived. Moses was the embodiment of the Mount Sinai ideal par excellence.

Moshiach too—the one who will usher in the Messianic Age—must also possess the ability to reach the highest spiritual levels while never losing sight of the need to relate to even the simplest and lowliest member of our society.

ESSAY THREE

THE MASTER PLAN

Contemporary society's pendulum is swinging
from one extreme to the other:

On extreme tells us that the Earth is ours to
plunder. It deifies man.

The other extreme deifies the Earth.

Torah insists that we glorify only the one G-d
who is the Master of all.

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ESSAY THREE

THE MASTER PLAN

The Original Environmentalists?

This week's Torah portion Behar discusses the Sabbatical and Jubilee years. These agricultural laws, which restrict our right to the land during these special years, appear similar to the environmental concerns of our modern day society. Environmentalists will constantly remind us that we have no right to exercise mastery over the Earth, because “the Earth does not belong to us, we belong to the Earth.”

The analogy here, however, is only a superficial one. The restrictions the Torah imposes on us during the Sabbatical and Jubilee year is not to teach us that the earth owns us, but that we and the Earth belong to G-d. As long as we recognize that G-d is the master of everything, we are given the right and indeed the obligation to exercise mastery over the world we were commanded by the

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Earth's Creator to "conquer" the earth. This does not mean that we should plunder and destroy, but to use all of G-d's creations for the fulfillment of G-d's "Master Plan" for the Universe.

The Master Plan

What precisely is G-d's Master Plan?

The Midrash informs us that G-d created the universe, because "He wanted a dwelling place in the lowliest place." G-d wanted a world which, from His vantage point is lowly, because it does not recognize its truly Divine nature. And, G-d's plan was that ultimately, through the observance of the Mitzvos, the physical world would become receptive to its Creator.

When this process is complete, and G-d will be recognized by all of existence, the world will have reached its very purpose. This is what the Messianic Age is all about. It is the time when all of our cumulative good and G-dly energy generated by all the Mitzvos ever performed, will become manifest and the world will be "filled with the knowledge of

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G-d as the sea is covered with water."
(Isaiah (11:9)).

Avoiding Extreme Philosophies

We can now appreciate the Torah's commandment concerning the cessation of work on the land, during the Sabbatical and Jubilee years. It was intended to instill within us the proper understanding of our relationship with the earth; a relationship which will lead to the world's perfection and ultimate goal.

By desisting from work on the land for the duration of these special years, one avoids the two possible extreme philosophies, both of which are deviations from G-d's Master Plan. One extreme is to think that the world is ours to do with it as we please, regardless of the consequences. The other extreme is to deify the earth and the laws of nature themselves, failing to realize that all of the universe was created by a Creator who transcends His own creation.

Desisting from work during the Sabbatical and Jubilee years is an expression of the belief

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that the world is not ours to plunder and destroy, but to treat with respect and with responsibility.

Conversely, the Earth is an instrument for the ultimate fulfillment of G-d's plan: to make this world a place where G-d can dwell. This we accomplish by using the world for functions that enable us to do more and more Mitzvos .

ESSAY FOUR

PROUD HUMILITY

Humility is a virtue.

Pride is a vice.

Proud humility is perfection.

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ESSAY FOUR

PROUD HUMILITY

The Unique Mountain

Sinai is the name of a mountain. Not just any mountain, but the one G-d had selected for giving the Torah to the Jewish people. And it is with this mountain that this week's Torah portion commences.

The portion introduces the laws concerning the Sabbatical year in Israel by stating that “G-d spoke to Moses on *Mount Sinai*.” In this introduction to the Sabbatical year, the Torah gives us a rather detailed description of the laws concerning this year.

From the manner in which the Torah emphasizes that these laws were given on Sinai, Rashi, the principle Bible commentator, concludes that all of the Torah's precepts – just like the laws of the Sabbatical year – were given, in vivid detail, on Mount Sinai.

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What was so unique about this mountain upon which G-d chose to give every last detail of the laws of the Torah?

The Midrash explains that Sinai was the lowest of all the mountains in the region. This teaches us the value of humility and how it is indispensable for the study of Torah.

The Angel is in the Details

The question can be raised: To teach us humility, it would have sufficed for G-d to have transmitted the general commandment. Why did He have to impart all the details, as well, on the same mountain? Couldn't He have waited to teach Moses all the details?

The answer lies in the way we approach the Torah and its multifaceted commandments.

An arrogant person feels uncomfortable about accepting any law that denies this individual his or her freedom to do whatever he or she pleases. It takes a measure of humility to accept someone else's authority.

There is yet another type of individual, who can accept a Mitzvah, even though it entails

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acceding to someone else's will, provided that he or she can tailor the mitzvah to his or her own liking. When one does so, the effect is that it is no longer the same mitzvah, but has become the individual's own preference. Thus, even the egotist – the antithesis of Sinai – can accept a Mitzvah; provided he or she can perform the mitzvah the way he or she likes to perform it.

The Torah, therefore, underscores in this week's parsha, that even the most minute details of a commandment must come from G-d. When it comes to a mitzvah we have no right to dictate the terms of the Mitzvah. All of it comes from G-d's revelation on Mount Sinai.

And only a truly humble person can accept the fact, that he or she is required to engage in a lifestyle that conforms to a higher will – in **all** of its details.

Why Not a Valley?

There is still one more question that can be asked. If G-d chose Mount Sinai to impress upon us the importance of humility in

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accepting the Torah, He should have given it in a valley?

The answer to this question is that Judaism, paradoxically, demands total surrender of our egos to G-d in the acceptance of every facet of every Mitzvah as well as bringing the totality of our personality into every Mitzvah.

G-d wants us to invest **our** feelings and **our** understanding in His commandments. He wants the Commandment to permeate our entire being.

The mountain symbolizes that the stature of every person which is not eliminated, humility notwithstanding. Rather, we accept the Torah **within** the confines of **our** personalities; not – G-d forbid – by altering the Torah to suit our tastes, but by making the Torah have such and effect on us, that it becomes **our** taste and personality.

Moshiach's Twin Virtue

Moshiach is described as a person who achieves the highest and deepest level of humility. This is alluded to in the Biblical

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description of Moshiach as a “poor man riding on a donkey.”

Yet, Moshiach is a king, an absolute monarch, who will rule over the entire world, as stated in the Torah. And as a king he will be accorded the highest honor.

How can he be both the paragon of the virtue of humility and simultaneously a powerful monarch?

The answer lies in the giving of the Torah ta Mount Sinai, which, as stated, was the lowest mountain, but still a mountain.

A Sinai personality, such as Moses and Moshiach is so devoted to G-d that he becomes a transparent conduit for G-d. Whatever power this personality possesses he does not ascribe to himself. He is acutely aware of and sensitive to the role that G-d plays in his life. The honor is not his and the sense of greatness is not his own.

As we prepare for the giving of the Torah in the Festival of Shavuos, and as we are preparing for the Final Redemption through Moshiach, we must endeavor to reveal our

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G-dly essence. Doing so will reveal our
humble pride.

ESSAY FIVE

SENSITIVITY

People are now discovering the damage
caused by verbal abuse.

Our Sages, basing their words on the Torah,
recognized the damage it can cause and
regarded it as a grievous sin.

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ESSAY FIVE

SENSITIVITY

Verbal Abuse

Our world is filled with fraud and deception. This week's Torah portion introduces a number of commandments that were intended to get people to deal honestly and ethically in their business dealings. Most civilized societies have adopted these rules and have proscribed fraudulent business dealings.

The Torah, however, does not stop at hurtful dealings that involve our property and money. It is equally unlawful, according to the Torah, to wrong someone verbally, by saying hurtful things.

The Talmud (Bava Metzia 58b) provides us with several examples of this type of crime. One of them is:

One should not tell a Ba'al Teshuvah-

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(one who had repented): “Remember your original deeds.”

While it might sound like a compliment “look how far you’ve come,” it is still hurtful to be reminded of one’s unsavory past.

Acknowledging Sin

A question has been raised by *Panim Yafos*, a Bible commentator: Doesn’t this illustration contradict the saying of King David in the Book of Psalms:

For I acknowledge my transgressions,
and my sin is **always** before me” (Psalm 51).

Despite the fact that King David had repented profusely for his role in the Batsheba incident, he still felt the need to never forget his past.

How can we reconcile these two apparently contradictory teachings? On one hand, King David taught us that one should always remember their misdeeds, and, on the other hand, the Talmud exhorts us to not remind a penitent of his past.

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Intention

One simple answer is that it depends on one's intentions. If one tells his friend — with sincerity and sensitivity — that he or she should never forget his or her past, so not to become complacent and smug, it is acceptable. It is only when one uses this “compliment” as a way of embarrassing his fellow, that it is forbidden.

In addition to the difference that one's intention makes in the way we speak to our fellow, there is another distinction that can be drawn.

Before or Opposite?

At first glance King David's emphasis on always remembering one's past sins appears problematic. Wouldn't the thought that one can never be rid of his her past lead to depression and destroy any motivation to change. Why should we change if we believe that our sin will always be there to haunt us?

The answer lies in just one word. The Hebrew word for “**Before** [me]” in the verse, “My sin is always before me” is “*neged*.” R. Schneur

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Zalman in his classic work the Tanya, explains that this word actually means “**opposite** me.” This means that one should **not** constantly think of one’s negative past. Rather, King David’s intent here was that while we should always be in a state of joy and look forward, we should always keep the thought of the past in the **back** of our mind. This will help us not take ourselves too seriously and will enable us to get along with others, by never becoming smug and arrogant with our spiritual growth.

Therefore, while it is right for us to keep the memory of our past in the back of our mind so that from time to time we can instill some humility into our lives, it is totally wrong for us to thrust the past of penitents in their face. Beside the hurt they may feel, will lead to sadness and retard their growth.

Jewish ethics demands of us that even when our intentions are to help someone we should be extra careful not to embarrass them. Every word that we utter, good intentions notwithstanding, must therefore be carefully weighed as to its effects.

Catalysts for the Rebuilding of the Third Temple

Our sages tell us that one of the catalysts for the destruction of the Second temple was the embarrassment of a rather sinister individual named *Bar Kamtza*.

Bar Kamtza traveled to the Roman Emperor and tried to convince him to crush the Jewish rebellion. This was his way of seeking revenge for being ejected from a party.

It follows then that the catalyst to rebuild the third Temple by Moshiach, is the care and concern we put into our words and actions that they do not hurt and embarrass another.

**LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – BEHAR-
BECHUKOSAI**

ESSAY SIX

THE ULTIMATE PARADOX

The ultimate challenge is to fuse heightened
spirituality with everyday life.

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BECHUKOSAI**

ESSAY SIX

THE ULTIMATE PARADOX

Who is the Creator?

In this week's parsha the Torah discusses the obligation to desist from agricultural work during the seventh year.

The theme of this prohibition has been compared by the Torah to the theme of the Shabbos, the seventh day of the week, when we are commanded to desist from all work. By refraining from work, we recognize G-d's sovereignty over His world and that it is not we who create, but G-d. During the week G-d asks us to be His partner in creation. He does not want us to think that it is our independent power that creates, but G-d's energy that infuses within us. How does one realize this? By desisting from work every Shabbos and by desisting from agricultural work every Seventh year.

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A question can be raised. If we learn this lesson every week, by refraining from 39 categories of creative labor — including all agricultural work — why do we need another reminder that occurs only once in seven years and is restricted to the agricultural labors? What lesson can be imparted from the Sabbatical year that the Sabbatical day does not convey?

Upon deeper reflection one can find at least two advantages to the Sabbatical year over the weekly Sabbath.

Incredulous!

First, despite the fact that one does not work on Shabbos, it is not a miracle that we could have food and all of our other needs provided for. As our Sages put it:

One who toils on the eve of Shabbos will eat on the Shabbos.

By contrast, the Torah itself expresses incredulity about how people will find food in the post Sabbatical year, because we are not allowed to sow and gather the produce during the seventh year. In the Torah's own words:

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If you shall ask, “What shall we eat?” I will command My blessing...”

The Torah itself declares that it is a miraculous process that is at work during the Sabbatical year. From this vantage point, the Sabbatical year exposed a Jew to a more pronounced sense of G-dly involvement in their lives than the weekly Shabbos.

The Additional Challenge of The Sabbatical Year

Second, and paradoxically, when a Jew rests on the Shabbos, it is a radical detachment from the physical world. Not only can we not sow, plow, reap etc., but all creative labors are forbidden.

During the Sabbatical year, however, there was no restriction on all other forms of work outside of agriculture. One could still be physically creative and involved and yet be exposed to a dramatic expression of G-dly energy.

This, then is the powerful message conveyed by the Sabbatical year that even the Shabbos did not convey. To be holy on the Shabbos is

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relatively easy, because one must divorce himself from all forms of work. In that state, it is easy to concentrate on the spiritual aspects of life and to dedicate the Shabbos to G-d.

During the Sabbatical year, where everything was normal — except for agricultural activity — one required a much greater effort to be involved in the ordinary workings of weekday life and yet experience a special relationship with G-d, one that transcended the Shabbos relationship.

If one of the main challenges of life is the need to deal with its paradoxes, Judaism is the ultimate challenge because it is one big paradox. We are required to live in a material world and yet have a relationship with G-d. And there is no time when this paradox is more pronounced than during the Sabbatical year.

Precursor of Messianic Age

This synthesis characterized by the Sabbatical year is even more expressive of the life we will experience in the Messianic Era. On the one

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hand, we will still have a physical world and all forms of work will be permitted, yet, it has been characterized as a Shabbos existence, because we will all be able to experience the ultimate G-dly involvement in our lives, even as we remain physical human beings engaged in physical pursuits.

**LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – BEHAR-
BECHUKOSAI**

ESSAY SEVEN

THE GIFT OF LIFE

Helping the needy is only a complete Mitzvah
when you also remove the stigma of poverty
from the recipient.

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BECHUKOSAI**

ESSAY SEVEN

THE GIFT OF LIFE

The Highest Form of Tzedakah

The Mitzvah of tzedakah is mentioned several times in the Torah, each time in a different context. From these variations we can gain some insight into the Torah's approach to this central Mitzvah; the Mitzvah that our Sages link to Redemption among its many other qualities:

Tzedakah is great that it hastens the Redemption. (Talmud, Bava Batra 10a)

In this week's parsha of Behar we read the following description about supporting those who are poor:

If your fellow among you becomes needy and his hand is faltering, you should support him, a convert or a resident, and he shall live with you.

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According to Rashi, this particular command involves assisting the poor individual before he becomes impoverished. Do not let him fall. If you do it will be much more difficult to pick him up.

According to Rambam (Hilchos Tzedakah) this commandment refers to assisting by tendering a loan or finding a job for someone, etc., so that the person can stand on his own two feet and does not have to resort to tzedakah. This approach, Rambam maintains, represents the highest of the eight levels of tzedakah.

No Condescension

Upon deeper reflection on this verse we can discern yet another nuance of tzedakah which elevates this Mitzvah to yet a higher level. When we examine this verse the question can be raised: why does the Torah have to add the words “and he shall live with you?” Would it not have sufficed to have stated, “you shall support him?” Furthermore, what precisely does it mean when it says that “he shall live with you?”

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When a person gives tzedakah to the poor and needy—especially if the person is poor in the spiritual sense of the word, as the Talmud (Nedarim 41a) states, “There is no poverty except in knowledge”—there is a tendency to put ourselves on a pedestal and look condescendingly on the impoverished individual whom we are helping.

The Torah therefore tells us,

If your fellow among you becomes needy and his hand is faltering, you should support him, a convert or a resident, and he shall live with you.

This can be understood to mean: if you come to the conclusion that your fellow is needy and is on a very low level—“he is faltering”—you might want to help him in a manner that suggests your superior strength. You might look at this individual as one who is faltering and lowly and who therefore needs your philanthropy.

Indeed, the Hebrew words *v’hechzakta bo* “and you shall support him” can also be rendered as “and you shall overpower him.” You might help him in a fashion that

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expresses your superior moral and spiritual strength in relation to this needy and lowly person. Indeed, your very reason for assisting this person may, in reality, be motivated by the desire to assert your superiority.

Lest one harbor this condescending attitude towards the poor in the process of helping them, the Torah concludes, “He shall live **with** you.” He shall be viewed as your equal.

Real Life

We can now also appreciate why the Torah states “He shall **live** with you.” Only when you view and treat the impoverished and faltering person as an equal, then, and only then, can he or she truly be said to live. A poor person is one of four types of downtrodden individuals about whom the Talmud (Nedarim 64b) states that he is compared to the dead. Helping another in a manner that highlights the poor person’s lowliness and degradation merely reinforces his or her inferiority complex as one who is lacking the very gift of true life. Nothing qualitatively has changed.

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Before they were assisted, the poor were considered to be devoid of real life, and even now, after they have been assisted, their “lifeless” status has not been fundamentally altered.

The Torah therefore says that when you assist someone in ways that give that person his or her dignity that they are, at least, your equal, then you are actually giving them the ultimate gift—the gift of life!

Moshiach the Poor Man Riding on a Donkey

Moshiach has been compared to a poor person. In the Biblical book of Zecharya (9:9) Moshiach is described as a “poor man riding on a donkey.” This imagery has been understood in many ways. In light of the foregoing understanding as to the proper attitude we must exhibit in our efforts to help the poor, one may suggest the following:

As much as we depend on Moshiach to liberate us from exile—for that is the mission for which he is chosen—Moshiach depends upon us. Moshiach is described as a king who does not assume that title until the people

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accept him as their monarch. In the words of our Sages, “There is no king without a nation.” This explains the references in Biblical literature to a king’s subjects saying: “*Yechi Hamelech*-Long live the King” (literally: “may the king live”).

And while this is true of every monarch it is especially true of Moshiach whose relationship with the people is even greater and more intrinsic than the relationship of other monarchs with their constituents. This, the Rebbe (Sefer Hasichos 5748) explains, is based on the teaching of the Ba’al Shem Tov that every Jew possesses a spark of Moshiach. Moshiach needs our spark to be ignited so that his flame can shine brightly.

Moshiach, in the time of exile before he is fully revealed, is thus considered to be in an impoverished and needy state because he depends on our “assistance.” Moshiach needs our input.

In the book of Psalms (Psalm 21:5) King David states:

He asked of You life, You gave it to
him—long life forever and ever.

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According to the Talmud (Sukkah 52a), King David is describing Moshiach's plea to G-d for life. Why would Moshiach have to ask for life? In light of the above it can be understood that Moshiach as our ultimate leader needs our input, our assistance, otherwise he remains in his impoverished state—"the poor man riding on a donkey"—which is likened to the absence of life.

How We Give Life to Moshiach

When we show our impatience and disgust with the stifling and painful conditions of exile by crying out to G-d, "*Ad Masai*-How much longer," we are, in effect, telling Moshiach that we are ready to leave exile and enter into a new age of Redemption. This enlivens and energizes Moshiach.

When we declare to Moshiach, as in Biblical tradition, "*Yechi Hamelech*-may the king live," it is our way of saying that the spark of Moshiach within us has been ignited and nurtured. Now, Moshiach, we want your role as the redeemer to be actualized.

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When we start to live our lives in a more Torah and Geulah/Redemption oriented way, with more purity and idealism, it is tantamount to declaring to Moshiach that it is time for him to “come alive” and fully assume the mantle of leadership. We are ready for him to reveal his potential as our redeemer. At that point, the internal Moshiach spark and the external Moshiach are in sync and both are no longer poor and needy. At that point it can be said, “and he shall **live with** you.”

ESSAY EIGHT

ABOVE AND WITHIN

To live life to the fullest one must first rise
above the limits of life and instill that
heightened view into life itself.

**LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – BEHAR-
BECHUKOSAI**

ESSAY EIGHT

ABOVE AND WITHIN

Why Connect this Mitzvah to Sinai?

This week's Torah portion, entitled Behar, introduces the laws of the Sabbatical year in a rather unique way.

And G-d spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai...

It is unusual that the Torah mentions that the commandment to observe the laws of the Sabbatical year was given on Mount Sinai. After all, weren't all the commandments given at Sinai? Why does the Torah specify that this particular commandment was given at Sinai, and it does not do the same for the others?

Rashi addresses this question and, citing a Midrashic source, explains that there is yet another anomaly in the manner the Torah discusses the Sabbatical year. With respect to most commandments the Torah gives us a general overview of the commandment. In the

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case of the Sabbatical year, however, the Torah discusses it in vivid detail. This, Rashi states, is to teach us that just as the commandment concerning the Sabbatical year was given at Sinai with all of its intricacies, so too, all of the other 612 commandments were transmitted to Moses at Sinai with all of their particulars.

But the question still persists. Why did the Torah select this Mitzvah in particular to serve as a model for all the others? It would seem to suggest that this mitzvah is regarded by the Torah as a fundamental one, whose theme underlies all the others. This, of course, begs the question, what is so pivotal about a law that applies only in Israel, and only once in seven years? And why is this law deemed to be the mode for all others?

A Strange Introduction

To understand the centrality of the Sabbatical year laws that restrict agricultural work every seven years, we should quote the way the Torah prefaces this commandment:

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Instead of stating succinctly, “And the earth shall rest on the seventh year,” it begins with “and the earth shall rest a Sabbath unto G-d. This is then followed with the phrase “six years you shall sow your fields... and the seventh year shall be a Sabbath unto G-d; you shall not sow your fields, etc.”

It is rather strange that the Torah begins with the need to rest,” without indicating when the earth shall rest.

It is also difficult to understand why it then states “six years you shall sow your fields,” since there is no commandment to sow a field for six years.

And to top it off, why does the Torah then conclude by repeating the commandment to rest on the seventh year.

The Rhythm of Judaism

Upon deeper reflection it will become apparent that the Torah introduces us here to the very rhythm of Judaism. And that, in turn, will explain why the Sabbatical year is such a central mitzvah.

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In order for one to be able to accomplish what he or she is expected to accomplish in the six years of work – namely, the process of contributing to the betterment of the world, materially and spiritually; i.e., to take the material and transform it into something spiritual – one must first rise above the material world in which he or she operates.

A person has to have as his or her basic introduction to life that there is a G-d that transcends nature; and it is to that G-d that he or she is connected. Endowed with this lofty perspective one is then equipped to enter into the hostile and spiritually resistant world head on. Not only will this individual not be adversely affected by it, but, on the contrary, he or she will refine it and uplift it.

The Torah therefore begins first by saying “And the earth shall rest a Sabbath unto G-d.” Before it even discusses the six years of work it instructs: First you must rise above nature; your first approach to life is that you are special; you transcend the natural order.

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We are the Extra Terrestrials!

In contemporary terms this means that before you can get involved with efforts to save the environment, fix the world, or make the world a better place, you have to essentially recognize that there is an aspect of life that is higher than nature; that there is something greater than planet earth. And before we can be good “earthlings,” we must first be extra-terrestrials in the spiritual sense of the word.

Conversely, the Torah teaches us that in order for us to ascend to higher spiritual planes, we must work six years down here on earth. We must realize that our mission and ultimate goal is not to become spiritual astronauts divorced from this natural world, but it is rather to transform the world below into something more sublime.

This rhythm of the Sabbatical year followed by six years, followed by another Sabbatical year is the rhythm and essence of all of Judaism. All of Jewish life pulsates with the rhythm of ascending to the heavens and then descending back to earth. With every Mitzvah we bring a Divine perspective to life, which then superimposes itself on the world and

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changes it for good. And with every Mitzvah we break out of the constraints of finite nature and connect to the infinite G-d.

And this rhythm was introduced at Sinai that possessed the paradoxical feature of being both the lowest mountain in the region, and yet not a valley but a mountain. This is to underscore that while G-d wants us to ascend the “mountain of G-d,” He also wants us to see the world from that vantage point so we can come back down from the mountain – as did Moses – and revolutionize the world.

Model of the Future

The six years of work and the seventh year of rest is also a model for the six millennia that the world existed since the creation of Adam and Eve, and a prelude to the seventh Millennium that will bring about a state of Sabbath the Messianic Age.

But it is important for us to realize that the world began with a Sabbatical existence that preceded the six millennia. “Before” creation there was only a G-dly existence that transcended nature from which nature

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emerged. And because of the fact that the origin of nature is supernatural, it follows that the supernatural is the true reality of existence. And only when we appreciate our true origin, can we follow it with thousands of years of meaningful and productive involvement with the natural universe, which in turn will lead us to the day when we will experience the synthesis of the supernatural and the natural.

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ESSAY NINE

EX/INTROVERTED

JUDAISM

Judaism is all-encompassing.

Judaism demands that we have both a public
and private involvement with Torah and
Mitzvos.

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BECHUKOSAI**

ESSAY NINE

EX/INTROVERTED JUDAISM

Synonyms for Mitzvos

Mitzvos, or the commandments of Judaism, are multifaceted and multi-layered. We can gain some insight into the wealth of the Torah and its commandments by simply surveying the many words the Torah employs for G-d's commandments. Most frequently they are referred to as *Mitzvos*, which simply means commandments. However, they are also referred to as *Mishpatim*, *Toros*, *Eidos*, *Pikudim* and other words.

King David in his 119th Psalm (the longest Biblical chapter with 176 verses) employs no less than ten expressions for these Divine precepts. And while they are all titles for the commandments, each of these names reflects a different aspect and nuance of the commandments.

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Etched in Stone

This week's Torah portion highlights one of these ten expressions. The very title of the second of two *Parshiyos* that we read this week is *Bechukosai*, referring to the precepts designated as *Chukim*. When translated literally this word means: engraved.

Most likely, the origin of this description derives from the fact that the first commandments that were given to the Jewish people were literally etched in stone.

What, we may ask, are we supposed to derive from this way of describing the commandments? Does it really make a difference if the commandments are etched in stone or written on paper?

Mountain and Engraved: Extroverted and Introverted

To better appreciate the significance of the concept of the engraved aspect of the Mitzvos, let us juxtapose this title *Bechokosai* with the title of the first Parsha that we read this week: *Behar*-On the mountain. What lesson are we

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to glean from the dual theme of this week's Torah reading: "mountain" and "engraved."

There are two approaches that we find with regard to observance of the commandments. When some people observe the commandments, it becomes a public spectacle. Everyone can see and hear that they are observing a Mitzvah. They wear Judaism on their sleeve. Whenever they do a Mitzvah, it is as if they are standing on top of a mountain, proclaiming to the world that they are G-d's chosen ones to change the world and make it a hospitable place for G-d.

This "in your face" extroverted form of Judaism has its place, provided that it is Mount Sinai, which our Sages say was the lowest mountain in that region. We may be proud of our Judaism, but it cannot be a means for us to look down condescendingly at others, rather it constitutes a way to express our joy and excitement at being privileged to possess such a treasure and to let others see it so they can acquire this treasure as well. The "mountain" theme of Judaism is intended to make Judaism more accessible; not more distant.

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And while this approach can be positive, the title of the second Torah reading, suggests that one must balance the “mountain” extroverted approach to Judaism, with the “etched and engraved” introverted, inner direction of the commandments.

Torah must penetrate into the subterranean layers of our personality. Judaism must be internalized and assimilated into our very beings. This process can extend to the point where we can no longer separate between the precept and the person, in the same manner that the words etched in stone are inseparable from the stone itself into which they are engraved.

Preparation for Shavuos and Moshiach

These two Torah portions are always read before the Holiday of Shavuos, the anniversary of the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai. To be fully receptive to these Divine teachings we must try to inculcate the paradoxical approach of externalizing and internalizing our Judaism.

Our Sages have stated that the process of the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai is a

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paradigm for the revelation of G-dly awareness that will accompany the Messianic Age. It follows then that the way we ought to prepare ourselves for this era is to live Judaism to the fullest by incorporating both the “*Behar*-mountain” approach as well as the “*Bechkosai*-engraved” approach to the study of Torah and the observance of the commandments.

**LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – BEHAR-
BECHUKOSAI**

ESSAY TEN

LET FREEDOM RING!

True freedom is when no barriers remain;
whether they are internal or external.

**LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – BEHAR-
BECHUKOSAI**

ESSAY TEN

LET FREEDOM RING!

The Liberty Bell

The Liberty Bell in Philadelphia is best known for two things: it is cracked and its inscription comes directly from this week's parsha:

Proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof.

This text is taken from the Torah's description of the Jubilee year. In the days of the first Temple, before the Ten Tribes were exiled and when the entire Jewish nation resided in the Land of Israel, the Jewish people had to follow two related calendar cycles. The first is the Sabbatical year cycle and the second is the fifty year Jubilee cycle. The former required that every seventh year the land would remain fallow and all of its vegetation declared free for all to take. The seventh year, known as

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shevi'is or *shemittah*, was a Sabbatical year devoted to spiritual pursuits.

The Jubilee cycle required counting seven Sabbatical cycles and on the fiftieth year, holding a “Super” Sabbatical or “Jubilee” year. During the Jubilee year, in addition to the requirements governing Sabbatical years, all land had to be returned to its original owners (or their heirs) to whom the land was bequeathed after it was conquered by Joshua.

In addition, the Jubilee year laws required release of all indentured servants, who had stayed on after their initial six year term of indenture. It is in **this** context that the Torah declares: "Proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof."

Liberty for All?

The famous Talmudic commentator *Pnei Yehoshua* asks why the Torah characterizes this year as a year of freedom for all its inhabitants? In actuality, it only set free an *eved ivri nirtza*, a Hebrew indentured servant whose ear was bored with an awl because he refused to leave when the six years of

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servitude were over. This was a rather rare situation. In the first place, only people who were so poor that they had to sell themselves or thieves unable to make restitution became indentured servants. The overwhelming majority of Jews were not indentured servants.

Furthermore, this law mandating release of servants only applied to an indentured servant who refused to be freed after six years. Again, this most likely represented a tiny fraction of the already small population of indentured servants, which was a miniscule percentage of the population.

Why then does the Torah state that during the Jubilee year freedom was to be proclaimed for **all** of the land's inhabitants? How would the release of a handful of servants bring freedom to all inhabitants?

Who's Boss?

Pnei Yehoshua provides us with a partial answer. The Talmud states that a person who purchased an indentured servant was actually buying a master for himself. For example, if the master had only one pillow he would have

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to give it to his servant. If he had one steak he would have to give that to his servant as well. Hence, when the servant was freed it actually brought freedom to his master as well.

Although this does not fully answer our question, since the majority of Jews were not masters and did not purchase indentured servants, it nevertheless carries an important lesson for anyone who is in power and able to exercise control over others.

A parent, teacher, employer, seller, leader or anyone else who is on the giving end of a relationship or transaction is, in one way or another, in control of the other person's life in a major or minor way. He or she must recognize an obligation to treat his or her "underling" not only as an equal but as his or her master.

The vaunted role as a person in whom power is vested only comes with the immense responsibility towards those who serve you. Thus, only when your "servant" is free are you also free; while he or she is under your control you are burdened and privileged with special responsibilities towards him or her.

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Freedom for All

There is a deeper way of explaining the reference to freedom “for all its inhabitants” that carries a special message for us today. As long as there is one isolated Jew who is not totally free then no Jew is truly free!

We are an organic and interdependent people. What affects one Jew in any part of the world affects every Jew. However, the connection between Jews is more pronounced with regard to the idea of freedom. A simple analogy can illustrate this point. If a person is tied to a prison cell by just one small chain attached to one finger it is no less a form of confinement than if the entire body was behind bars. The entire Jewish nation is likened to one body. If one organ of this body is attached to Galus then all of the Jewish people are in Galus.

Cracked!

Since everything that we hear or see has to teach us a lesson, as the Ba'al Shem Tov taught us, the above can serve as an explanation for the cracked Liberty Bell. Liberty that doesn't include everyone may be

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sweet for those who are free but there will always be a fissure in that Liberty Bell.

That crack should remind us that no matter how good things might be for some in Galus, materially and spiritually, we are still very much in Galus.

The question can still be asked: Why is this powerful lesson expressed specifically with respect to the Jubilee year?

Fifty Gates of Holiness

Fifty is a significant number.

The Torah was given fifty days after the Jews were liberated from Egypt. Their freedom was not complete, however, until they received the Torah and became a nation with a G-dly purpose. Hence, we can see that the number fifty is related to the idea of complete and absolute freedom.

But that just shifts the question to ask of the giving of the Torah, why was it given after **fifty** days?

Kabbalah and Chassidic philosophy teach us that there are fifty gates of holiness. The first

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forty nine are achievable with painstaking effort. However the fiftieth gate of holiness is far more elusive. We cannot pass through without Divine intervention. Thus, no matter how high we climb or how many gates we transit, we will always be frustrated because we realize that the final destination is beyond our unaided reach and grasp.

Indeed, the further we progress, the more acutely we feel our yearning for the ultimate level that we lack. When people are only on the first levels, they feel little need to climb to the top. They are usually content at the level they are on, having carved out a comfortable niche for themselves. When one reaches the 49th step of spirituality and connectivity to G-d, however, he or she is “sick with love” and passion to attain the elusive 50th level.

It's no coincidence that the Hebrew word for “sick” – *choleh* - has the numerical value of 49. The person who reaches that stage is lovesick for the ultimate experience of connection to G-d's elusive Essence.

As long as we have yet to master the fiftieth stage, we will feel that we are still very much like the beginner who has yet to take the first

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steps. Stage numbers one and forty-nine are equally light years behind the fiftieth stage.

Thus, it was only in the fiftieth - Jubilee – year, when the Jewish people would have been granted a taste of the final stage of holiness, that the Torah speaks of freedom for all. As long as we have not attained the fiftieth step, we cannot feel that we are free; there is still a mighty barrier between our achievements and that which is still unattained. That feeling persists because we are still in a confined state of spiritual existence.

In addition, only the person who feels that he or she remains in Galus from not yet having attained the fiftieth level is also sensitive to the fact that others are mired in an even deeper Galus. The contented individual is usually impervious to the suffering of others.

It is no wonder that the Hebrew word for “all” – “kol” - in the verse “Proclaim liberty for all” has the numerical value of fifty.

We Want it All!

The “twin” lessons we learn from the above are that:

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1) No Jew is truly free until all of the Jewish people have attained total physical and spiritual freedom; and

2) No Jew is free without rising above the constraints of even the loftiest spiritual levels associated with the number 49.

In practical terms this means that no matter how good this Galus has been for any individual, the fact that

a) there are others who are still suffering; and that

b) we haven't reached the ultimate fiftieth stage of holiness means that we still have our work cut out for us. We must sincerely and forcefully "demand" that we be taken out of the stifling state of Galus.

There are some who, unfortunately, confuse the idea that we have to be thankful to G-d for all that we have with being in a state of contentment and complacency. While we must thank G-d for every small blessing we enjoy, as we do countless times daily, we must also plead and demand that He bring an end to the suffering and pain associated with Galus and the limits it imposes on us.

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Let us not be like a beggar who wins the lottery and then spends his newly acquired millions to build elevators in high-rise buildings so he shouldn't have to climb the stairs to beg...

Our generation has won the lottery in so many ways. We are so much more fortunate than our forebears in terms of our prosperity and the opportunities we have to study Torah and perform Mitzvos. We should not use these gifts to feel comfortable remaining in Galus, even in its most benign form.

Let us not rest until it can be said that, indeed, unadulterated liberty was proclaimed throughout **all** the land unto **all** its inhabitants. Let us not rest until the crack in the process of Redemption (the ultimate Liberty Bell) will be made whole forevermore.

ESSAY ELEVEN

IT'S OUR LAND!

Our claim to the Land of Israel is not political,
International law or even historical.

It was given to us by G-d.

Observing the agricultural Mitzvos regarding
the Land is our way of highlighting and
maintaining our connection to the land.

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ESSAY ELEVEN

IT'S OUR LAND!

The Centrality of the Sabbatical Year

This week we read the twin portions of *Behar* and *Bechukosai*. Between the two, many varied themes are discussed. There is one subject though that seems to be the link that ties the two portions together. It is the subject of *Shemittah*, the requirement of relinquishing ownership of our land and ceasing our agricultural work during the Sabbatical year which occurs—as the name Sabbatical suggests—every seven years in Israel.

In the first portion of Behar, the Torah speaks of the importance of this Mitzvah and of how G-d would perform the incredible miracle that the land would produce enough food—in the sixth year of the seven year cycle—to last them for three years.

In the second parsha—*Bechokosai*—the Torah admonishes the Jewish people against

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neglecting the observance of the Sabbatical year.

Indeed, the Torah predicts that if they will not respect the law that requires the land to rest during those Sabbatical years, the Jewish people will be exiled from their land.

Alas, as the prophets affirm, this was indeed the case. The predictions materialized, and the sin that contributed to the destruction of the first Temple and the exiling of the Jewish people from their land was the abolition of the Sabbatical year.

Does the Punishment Fit the Crime?

The question has been raised, how can the failure to observe the restriction of work on our fields be considered such an egregious breach of our covenant with G-d that it would bring about the horrible consequences of the exile? Why would a merciful Father so punish his children for a breach of contract? The punishment of exile—and all the suffering it has brought in its wake—does not fit the crime!

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And although, G-d's ways are unfathomable to the human mind, nevertheless, the Torah requires of us to make some sense of its teachings. And since the correlation between the two—failure to observe the Sabbatical year and the exile of the Jewish nation from their land—must have some conceptual basis. And even if it does not satisfactorily explain all of Jewish suffering, it must give us some insight as to the mechanism by which G-d operates and more importantly it must furnish us with some guidance as to what G-d expects of us and what do we have to focus on to reverse the exile.

Cause and Effect

One way to look at the punishments of the Torah in general is to not really view them as punishments, but as consequences of our actions. For example, if a person cuts his finger and blood will drip, no one will say that the loss of the blood is a punishment for the crime of cutting a finger—it is a natural consequence.

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G-d also set up a system of cause and effect. The great moralist, kabbalist and Talmudist, R. Yeshaya Halevi Hurvitz (of the seventeenth century, in his classic work known as the *Shelah*) writes that negative actions generate commensurate negative consequences. They are not simply acts of revenge—tit for tat—on G-d's part.

Some, therefore, explain the punishment of exile for failure to observe the Sabbatical year not as a punishment, but as a natural and direct result of not respecting the sanctity of the land.

This can be explained on two levels:

Our Claim to Israel

First, our attachment to the land of Israel is first and foremost a spiritual one. The Midrash uses the analogy of a tailor-made garment that is made to fit one person; and one person only. Similarly, the Land of Israel was fashioned by its Creator to be “worn” by one people, and one people exclusively. No other people could succeed in colonizing the Land of Israel as history has demonstrated. In

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fact, so many nations suffered immensely because they sought to colonize the land.

However, we can take the analogy of a garment a step further. Even a tailor made garment can that was made to fit one person will not fit him or her either if he or she gains or loses weight. The same would hold true if the garment is abused in one way or another.

Thus, when we fail to appreciate the sanctity of the land and deplete it of its true character—exemplified by the lack of respect for the land itself by working on the Sabbatical year—the land can no longer contain its inhabitants, and the exile ensues.

On a somewhat different plane, the correlation between exile and the Sabbatical year observance can be understood in light of the very first comment of Rashi on the Torah—written at the time of the Crusades. He refers to a Midrash that addresses the charge of the nations that we stole their land from them. The answer, Rashi says, is the story of Genesis, which declares G-d as the Master of the entire universe and of the Land of Israel in particular. He is therefore the One

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who decides for whom it is suited. He willingly gave to it the Jewish people.

If our claim to Israel is based on our own theories as to what constitutes ownership of a land, there can be many arguments that would render our claims irrelevant. If it is the U.N. or the Balfour Declaration that represents our claim to the Land, then it can as easily be rescinded. The same U.N. that gave us the land can declare Zionism to be racism and can ultimately delegitimize Israel.

Our ultimate claim to Israel is based not even on historical grounds. Possessing a land for 4,000 years is a strong point in our favor, but it is not the history that makes the land ours; it's the fact that it is ours—by Divine fiat—that gave us and the land our history!

Demonstrating our Claim to the Land

How were we expected to show that the land we inhabited was given to us by G-d and therefore unequivocally ours? When we observed the Sabbatical year and declared the land ownerless so that everyone was free to avail themselves of our land for that year, that

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demonstrated that the land was G-d's; not the people's as in a Socialist and Communist system, and not the corporations and private citizens as in a Capitalists system. And it is G-d who gave us the land, to be its eternal guardians.

When we failed to observe the sanctity of the land and the demands that it made on us to sincerely express our belief—and back it up with action—that the land was G-d's, we could no longer dismiss the challenges against our relationship with the land. We were therefore exiled because we dismissed our own claim to the land. It is as if we took the lease we had and hid it so we could no longer prove our claim.

The lesson from all of the above is the realization that our claim to Israel—not just Jerusalem—is not political. Furthermore, our security there and in the Diaspora depends on the way we demonstrate our belief in our own claim to the land as well as our appreciation for our Torah, the source of our claim to the land.

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Return to the Land Proudly and Humbly

Our return to the land in the Messianic Age will be one recognized by all the nations of the world and will no longer be contested. Meanwhile, we have to proudly and humbly assert our claim to the land:

Proudly, because it is ours and will remain ours forever.

Humbly, it is ours not because we are stronger and militarily superior. It is also not because we are smarter and more politically astute. It is ours simply because G-d decided to give it to us so that Israel becomes the place from which light will emanate to the entire world.

And as the prophet predicts, all of the nations will stream towards it, and will join us in our capital Jerusalem and assist us in building the Third Temple that will usher in a period of peace—not the false peace that denies the truth and reality of the Jewish nature of Israel and Jerusalem—but the genuine and permanent peace promised us in the Torah in this week's parsha.

ESSAY TWELVE

WHAT IS THE QUESTION?

Judaism loves the right questions.

Questions that demoralize are to be rejected.

Questions that inspire us to act are
commendable.

Questions that get us excited and generate joy
and enthusiasm are the most desirable.

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BECHUKOSAI**

ESSAY TWELVE

WHAT IS THE QUESTION?

The Enigmatic Question

The Torah generally does not raise questions about its own dictates. The Torah gives voice to G-d's will. Our responses are not what the Torah is about. Yes, in several of the narratives, the Torah will describe the actions of the Jewish people; how they accepted, followed and submitted to the Divine will or, when they rejected it. But, the Torah never introduces a hypothetical challenge to G-d's will.

The above is true, with, at least, one notable exception. In this week's parsha, the Torah introduces the commandment to observe the Sabbatical year, when no sowing and harvesting is permitted. The commandment to observe the Sabbatical year is then followed by the commandment to observe a Jubilee year, which follows a Sabbatical year and is

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also bound by the restriction of sowing and harvesting.

The Torah then makes a promise to those who observe the commandments:

...you shall dwell securely on the land. The land will give its fruit, and you will eat your fill; you will dwell securely on it.

After making this promise of security and prosperity the Torah “volunteers” the following hypothetical question:

If you will say: What will we eat in the seventh year? Behold! We will not sow and not gather in our crops!

The Torah proceeds to give G-d's response:

I will ordain My blessing for you in the sixth year and it will yield a crop sufficient for the three-year period. You will sow in the eighth year, but you will eat from the old crop; until the ninth year, until the arrival of its crop, you will eat the old.

Commentators are puzzled by the hypothetical challenge of a skeptic that was included in the Divine narrative! When G-d

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commands us to observe the Sabbath the Torah does not give voice to the many skeptics who reject the commandment. Why does the Torah single out this commandment to address the likely challenge of the skeptics?

A Positive Question

The Rebbe (*Likkutei Sichos* volume 27, p. 184) asks another question, the answer to which will also resolve our question. The Rebbe notes that the precise wording of the Torah is not “if you will say,” but “**when** you will say.” In other words, the Torah is predicting that it is inevitable that we will ask that question, implying that it is a positive question that should be asked.

The Rebbe explains that rather than viewing the questioner as a skeptic, we should view him or her as an inquisitive person, much like the Wise son of the Passover Haggadah who asks about the meaning of all the commandments. His interest is not to challenge the observances of Passover but rather to understand what they are all about.

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Similarly, here, the Rebbe elaborates, the question is not how it will be possible for us to observe the Sabbatical year. The answer to that is clear, G-d will certainly provide. Rather the question is: how is G-d going to provide for our needs under these circumstances. Not how can He, but how will He do it. The questioner accepts the premise that G-d could certainly do it, but he is curious to know which method will G-d use. Will he provide us with Manna from heaven or will He avail Himself of some other miraculous means of sustaining us?

The answer, the Torah gives is that in the sixth year of the Sabbatical cycle the yield will be blessed so that we will an ample supply of grain for three years.

Lesson for the End of the Sixth Millennium

The fact that this “sophisticated” question is mentioned specifically in the context of the eve of the Sabbatical year suggests that it conveys a message for us as we stand in the end of the sixth millennium poised to enter

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into the Age of Redemption, which parallels the Sabbatical year.

What is the lesson for our times?

We too have good reason to ask a multifaceted question of G-d. Why are we still in Galus? Why is there still suffering in the world? Why hasn't the third and final Bais Hamikdash been built? Why can't we see our Rebbe?

But there are three ways this question can be asked. One is objectionable, another is proper and desirable, but the third form of the question is the ideal form. And, as we shall see, this form can actually bring about the desired answer—the Redemption!

The first, undesirable, form of the question derives from a lack of faith and trust in G-d and in the words of His Torah. The third, ideal, version derives from profound faith and comes from the mind and heart of a sophisticated Jew.

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Lost!

Let me illustrate this point with three attitudes that one can have when one's day is not going according to plan.

For example, a person may be driving towards a destination and discovers that he had made a wrong turn and is now miles away from where he thought he should be. There are actually three different ways people will react. (Often, it will depend on the importance of getting to one's destination, but one's personality will also determine his reaction.)

The first reaction, primarily coming from a high strung individual, will be to get upset, frustrated, angry and depressed. In some extreme instances one may even blame someone else for his error. He may even lash out at a loved one for not catching his wrong turn, or even blame G-d for this unfortunate turn of events. This irate person might then express his frustration with the question: "Why is this happening to me?"

The second reaction, coming from a more docile and easy-going individual, is to focus on corrective measures. His question will be,

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“What do I do now?” He realizes consciously or subconsciously that it is futile to get angry and counterproductive to play the blame game. Rather, his focus is on making a u-turn and getting back on route.

Undoubtedly, the second approach is superior and healthier than the first. But it is not the ultimate approach.

Adventure

The ideal approach is the one of who gets excited about the detour. Certainly, he realizes that this was all an expression of Divine Providence. This person concludes that G-d has orchestrated this diversion to put him or her in a certain place for some presently unknown purpose.

I remember once that after having made an unwanted detour, I ended up in a remote area where I found a colleague of mine whose car had broken down, leaving him stranded. Stories of similar incidents can be heard every day.

The person who has this strong belief in Divine Providence not only feels good after he

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experiences G-d's plan, but even before. No sooner than we realize we are lost we know that we are on an adventure. G-d has something in store for us and our natural sense of curiosity gets the adrenalin flowing and our spirits are uplifted.

It may be suggested (See Chassidic commentary, *B'er Mayim Chaim*) that these three approaches to the detours in life parallel three of the four sons who ask questions at the Seder. (The fourth son is the one who does not know how to ask questions.)

The Three Sons

The Rasha, rebellious son, is angered by all the tedious work involved in the Passover holiday. He is angry that his life of hedonism and narcissism is being disrupted by the Seder. The tone of his question is unmistakably angry and defiant. He was forced to make a detour on his life's road and he is one unhappy customer.

The Tam, simple son, doesn't get angry or excited; he is down-to-earth and practical. He asks, "What is this?" What am I supposed to

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do? This approach is certainly positive but is still not the ideal.

The Chochom, wise son, gets excited at the Seder. He wants to know the secret behind all that he's doing. He knows there's more to the story. His soul's intellectual curiosity and desire for spiritual adventure motivates him to ask more and more.

Let us apply these three approaches to the present situation. (See *Likkutei Sichos* ibid, for a different lesson.)

Three Shades of the Galus Question

Our question, why are we still in Galus can be approached three ways.

The first, undesirable, approach is to become frustrated, angry and depressed. As a consequence of this negative attitude, the person may lose faith and become lax in doing those very things that will hasten the Redemption.

The second approach is to focus on what is our proper course of action. We should ask what the Rebbe told us we should do to

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prepare ourselves for and hasten the Redemption. The answer includes the emphasis on learning the Torah's teachings about Redemption and Moshiach to condition our minds to think in Moshiach-oriented fashion and to translate that sensitivity into our behavior. Or, as the Rebbe put it: "live with Moshiach!"

And while this approach is certainly commendable, every second we remain in exile we must look for the spiritual "adventure" that G-d certainly had in mind for us in our temporary "detour" and take advantage of this unique opportunity.

This realization—coupled with the trust that we will imminently be shown the express route to the Bais Hamikdash—should bring us tremendous joy.

There is, however, an important caveat. Even as we express our joy at the new adventures we confront in these last moments of exile, we simultaneously must cry out to G-d and demand that He relieve the pain and suffering of His people. The Rebbe emphasized that we must alternate between crying out with the words "*ad masai*—how much longer?" and the

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joy of knowing that we are living in Messianic times.

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ESSAY THIRTEEN

LET FREEDOM RING!

(2)

Freedom is not defined by the license to do
anything we want.

Rather, it is the ability to live in accordance
with our core beliefs of our soul.

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ESSAY THIRTEEN

LET FREEDOM RING! (2)

“Proclaim liberty throughout the land...”

“Proclaim liberty throughout the land...” These immortal words, inscribed on the Liberty Bell, are mentioned in this week’s Torah portion in conjunction with the Jubilee year. The Jewish people were commanded to count seven cycles of seven years. After the last cycle – the fiftieth year – they were to observe the Yovel, or Jubilee year, during which the slaves were to be liberated.

The fact that we read this portion during the period of the year that is prefatory to the upcoming Holiday of Shavuot that occurs on the **fiftieth** day from Passover, is not a coincidence.

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True Freedom

Without the Torah a Jew cannot be truly free. As our sages state in Pirkei Avos (Ethics of the Fathers):

There is no free person except one who occupies himself with the study of the Torah.

This, our sages derive from a play on words in the phrase “engraved on the tablets.” The Hebrew word for engraved (*charus*) can also be read (*cheirus*) which means freedom.

In Chassidic thought this concept is explained as follows:

Freedom is to be measured by the degree that one is able to function in accordance with one’s true desires.

For example: a person, whose greatest ambition and pleasure in life is to express himself through song, is only a free person if he or she has the capacity to develop that talent. Though the person may be incarcerated in the harshest prison, since he or she can pursue and develop his or her core dream of singing – he or she is truly free.

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Conversely, if the same person were to be physically free but not allowed to sing and develop his or her talent, he or she would be considered anything but a free person.

A Jew's innermost desire is to express himself through Torah. When a Jew is capable of doing so unobstructed, s/he is free in the truest sense of the word.

Another parallel can be drawn from the concept of freedom associated with the Jubilee year and the concept of freedom through Torah.

True Freedom: Universal Freedom

In the verse cited at the beginning of this message: "Proclaim liberty throughout the land," the Torah continues: "unto **all** of its inhabitants." Commentators raise the question as to why the Torah says "unto all of its inhabitants," when, in reality, only the slaves have to be freed.

One answer provided by commentators is that, in truth, when one Jew is not free, no one is truly free. For freedom – whether physical or spiritual – to be complete it must

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be all encompassing. Inasmuch as all Jews are one and are compared to different parts of one body, it follows logically that if one part of the body is impaired and cannot perform its function, then the entire person is impaired.

The same can be said about the receiving of the Torah at Mount Sinai. If one Jew were to have been missing from the liberating experience of Sinai, no Jew's acceptance of the Torah would have been complete.

Why the Need for Moshiach?

Our sages tell us that the experience of the Jubilee year and of Sinai are paradigms for the liberating experience of the future Redemption.

We are now living in an enlightened age. We enjoy more freedom in this country – as well as in most countries of the world – than in any other time in history. Our freedom extends not only to material matters, but – thank G-d – to spiritual opportunities as well. There is hardly a place on earth where a Jew

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does not have the ability to fully express his Jewishness with pride.

Why then, some ask, do we need the Redemption through Moshiach? What is wrong with the situation the way it is now? And while things are not perfect, why couldn't we just put our faith in the eventual evolutionary process that will improve our situation as we go into the future?

The answer is that no matter how good is our lot and no matter how far we can progress, we can never reach the point of absolute freedom – to express our innermost divine essence – for absolutely everybody. As long as one Jew remains left behind in a compromised state of either physical or spiritual freedom, none of us are truly free.

Only Moshiach, with his G-d given ability to reveal the innermost divine essence of our souls, can bring true liberty to all of the land and to all of its inhabitants.

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ESSAY FOURTEEN

WHOSE LIFE IS IT?

Never before have we witnessed the incredible
miracles of medicine to preserve and prolong
life.

Yet, never before have we seen such erosion
of life's intrinsic value.

Our challenge today is to allow light and life
to prevail over darkness.

**LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – BEHAR-
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ESSAY FOURTEEN

WHOSE LIFE IS IT?

The Talmudic Debate

Whose life takes precedence? Your own or someone else's?

Imagine you are traveling with another person in a desert with but one pitcher of water that belongs to you. If you were to share your water with the other individual, it is certain that both of you will die. Your only chance of survival is to keep all of the water that you own for yourself.

This question has been debated in the Talmud and resolved by Rabbi Akiva on the basis of a verse in this week's parsha. The Torah states: "And your brother shall live **with you**." This verse teaches us that your life takes precedence over your brother's life." (Talmud, *Bava Metzia* 62a)

In that passage, the Talmud records the

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opinion another sage, *Ben Patura*, who maintains that one should divide the water between the two of them, “it is better that they both drink and die, rather than one see the death of the other.” It was Rabbi Akiva who cited the foregoing verse that challenged the view of Ben Patura.

We must understand the logic of Rabbi Akiva’s opinion, based on the verse in this week’s parsha. Why should one not be required to divide the water between the two of them, so that they both live at least a while longer? Furthermore, wouldn’t it be more heroic and righteous to split the water between the two, as Ben Patura maintained?

On Lease

To understand this matter, it is necessary to appreciate the view of Judaism concerning the importance of maintaining one’s own life.

It is well known that Jewish law outlaws and condemns suicide. A person, in his right mind, who takes his own life is considered to have committed a crime more heinous than murder.

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(It should be noted that despite the harsh attitude the Torah takes towards suicide, in practice the rabbis were rather lenient. This is due to two factors: First, a person who commits suicide is almost always not in his/her right mind. Consequently, they cannot be held liable for any crime they might commit. Secondly, the Talmud states that if the suicide victim was conscious for even a few seconds after inflicting the fatal wound or jumping from a high point etc., it is assumed that s/he expressed regret and is thus considered to have atoned for his/her crime. This lenient attitude expressed by the Talmudic rabbis, does not, however, detract from the serious nature of suicide.)

Why is suicide deemed more serious than murder?

One explanation is that, in reality, our life is not ours. Our lives belong to G-d who has “leased” it to us for the express purpose of using it to serve G-d, by refining and changing ourselves and the world in which we live.

When people take their own lives, they are, in essence, really taking a life that is not their

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own, but G-d's. It is no different from taking another person's life.

In addition to being an act of murder, suicide also terminates one's special "lease" agreement that G-d has given us when we were born. One has thus frustrated the very purpose for which one was created. Suicide is therefore a double crime: it is murder and the rejection of one's mission in life.

Our Life takes Precedence

When one's life is in conflict with another person's life, the Torah says that one's life takes precedence over the other. The logic is simple: Both lives are precious. Both lives are G-d's and killing them is tantamount to an attack against G-d. Indeed, this is why, according to the Midrash, the first commandment ("I am the L-rd your G-d") is situated (if one reads the commandments horizontally rather than vertically) next to the sixth commandment ("Thou shall not murder").

Murder is a denial of and an affront to G-d. But, to take one's own life is to also repudiate

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one's responsibility and very purpose of existence. Thus the responsibility one has to one's own life is greater than the responsibility one has to any other life.

Why Now?

The issues of suicide and euthanasia have become very popular in modern times. Many have asked why there is such an erosion of life with so much violence in the present day and age.

The answer lies in the proximity of our generation to the Final Redemption, at which time life will enjoy unprecedented value. Not only will there be no more war or violence, we will also enjoy unprecedented good health and longevity.

Moreover, at some point in the Messianic Age, an even more incredible age of life will commence. It will be the beginning of the Resurrection of the Dead and the ensuing eternal life here on this earth!

According to the teachings of Kabbalah, the greater a spiritual positive force there is a parallel negative force to counter it and

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challenge us to prevail over it.

Hence, since we now are on the verge of entering into this new age where we will fully appreciate the true nature of life as a manifestation of the Divine in the world, we are now also experiencing the greatest challenge to life.

Accordingly, we should focus more attention on the meaning and sanctity of life, in preparation for the age when we will all experience eternal and essential life.

ESSAY FIFTEEN

A WALL OF FIRE

Humans are in need of walls that protect and
preserve their spiritual integrity.

The only solid wall is the invisible one; Torah
study and the G-d given commandments.

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ESSAY FIFTEEN

A WALL OF FIRE

A Buyer's Market

When a person would sell a house in ancient Israel, the house would revert to its original owner with the onset of the Jubilee year, which occurs every 50 years.

There is an exception to this rule. The Torah, in this week's parsha, states:

When a man sells a residential house in a walled city he shall be able to redeem it until the end of one year after he had sold it... However, if it is not redeemed by the end of this year, then the house in the city that has a wall shall become the permanent property of the buyer [to be passed down] to his descendants. It shall not be released by the Jubilee.

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The Talmud states that even if the city once had a wall, even if it no longer exists, it is regarded as a walled city and does not revert to the original owner at the Jubilee.

The Talmud bases this on the Hebrew word *lo* that appears in conjunction with the phrase “the city that has a wall.” The word *lo* is a homonym. For the same word can be spelled with the letter *vav*, which means “has,” or with the letter *aleph*, which then has the opposite meaning: “has not.”

In this context, that word *lo* has both spellings. In the written version of the text (known as the *ktiv*) it is written *lo* with an aleph and means, has **no** wall, while the authorized way of pronouncing it (known as *kri*) is with a *vav* which means that it “has a wall.”

To reconcile these two distinct readings of the text, the Talmud maintains that it refers to a city that **had** a wall, but does not have one now. It **had** but **has no** wall.

All matters of Torah must have a lesson for us in our own journey in life. What lesson can we derive from the law of the walled city; that

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it belongs to the purchaser forever. And, what lesson can be derived from the city that had a wall but does not have one now?

The World's a City

The city can be a metaphor for the world in which we live. This “city” really belongs to G-d, but He has allowed us to “purchase” a home and take up residence in this city and make use of it for fifty years.

The number fifty is based on the statement in Ethics of the Fathers that the age of 20 is when life begins in the sense of a person's full maturity. In the words of Ethics of the Fathers: “20 years is for pursuing.” This is interpreted to mean that at the age of 20 we will first go out into the world and pursue a living. In addition, according to the Talmud, G-d does not punish us for our sins until the age of twenty, despite the fact that we assume responsibility for the commandments at the age of thirteen. This means that true adulthood and maturity comes at the age of twenty.

Now, the Psalmists says that “man's years are

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three-score and ten.” Hence, the number of years that we are in full control of our status as “homeowners” in this city we call life, is fifty.

After the years that we spend on this earth, we discover that we take nothing along with us. All the wealth, trophies and honors are left behind. However, if the city has a wall around it, our share in it belongs to us forever; it becomes our permanent acquisition. What does the wall refer to?

In rabbinic literature, the wall refers to Torah study because, in addition to all of its other properties, the Torah also possesses the capacity to surround us and protect us, so that the outside influences do not pollute and compromise our minds, hearts and souls. As such, our bodies remain pure and unaffected by the negativity of the world around us.

With the right protection afforded us by the Torah, we gain mastery over our own lives and everything that we do is encompassed and influenced by the Torah. Our city and the home we have in it is a Torah city that lasts forever and that we take with us into the next world and into the future Messianic Age.

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This thought mirrors the Talmudic teaching that when Moshiach will come, not only we all return to Israel, but even the synagogues and houses of study in the Diaspora will be transplanted in the Holy Land.

When we take our homes and transform them into places that are surrounded and influenced by the study of Torah, our homes are no longer defined as private, secular domiciles, but acquire the status of synagogues and houses of study. They too will endure forever and be transplanted in Israel.

Two Kinds of Walls

However, there are two types of walls that parallel two levels of Torah study. The first is the wall that we can see with our eyes of flesh. This refers to the aspects of Torah that deal with worldly, ephemeral and, therefore, tangible objects and experiences, i.e., the laws of Torah that govern how we live our physical lives.

There is another dimension of Torah, however, one that deals with the spiritual and ethereal dimension of Torah, the part of

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Torah that discusses G-d, the soul and higher worlds. This wall, if it was preceded by a physical wall, i.e., the knowledge of the practical teachings of Torah, also has the capacity to protect one's home and accord it permanence.

Indeed, the latter "invisible wall" not only imbues our houses with permanent status that will be transported to Israel, it is actually a prelude to the fulfillment of the prophecy that in the Messianic Age, G-d says, "I will be a wall of fire around her." This wall of fire is the wall that we build now by learning the fiery dimension of Torah, the part of Torah that evokes our soul's fiery passion for G-d.

ESSAY SIXTEEN

REVERSE ORDER

Judaism is two pronged: Torah and Mitzvos.

While Mitzvos liberate our bodies; Torah
liberates our mind.

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ESSAY SIXTEEN

REVERSE ORDER

The Patriarchs

This week's parsha contains one of the harshest rebukes ever given to the Jewish People, known as the "*Tochacha*." However, after all the dire consequences listed for errant behavior, the Jewish people are promised that G-d will remember the covenant that He made with the Patriarchs, which will restore the Jewish people to their original state:

And I will remember My covenant with Jacob as well as My covenant with Isaac and My covenant with Abraham...

The question has been raised, why are the Patriarchs mentioned here in reverse order, first Jacob, then Isaac and last Abraham? In virtually every other place, where their names are mentioned in the Torah, their names are

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mentioned in chronological order. Why is it reversed here?

Jacob Weakest or Strongest of the Patriarchs

According to Rashi, the Torah wants to tell us that even Jacob, the junior of the Patriarchs, suffices and if he doesn't suffice "he has Isaac with him and if that doesn't suffice he has Abraham with him."

The Midrash, it seems, takes the opposite approach that Jacob's merit is the strongest, so much so that even the fact that Abraham himself was saved was only due to the merit of Jacob.

Rashi's approach, on the surface, sounds more reasonable. Jacob was the last of the Patriarchs and it would seem that his greatness rested on the laurels of his predecessors, Abraham and Isaac. How can we understand the Midrashic approach that raises Jacob's position to the top of the hierarchy of the Patriarchs? Moreover, according to the Midrash it was Jacob's merit that saved Abraham? Why would Abraham need Jacob's merit?

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Internal Patriarchal System

Each one of us possesses characteristics and spiritual energy that we inherited from our Patriarchs. There is an Abraham, Isaac and Jacob within every Jew. In times of crisis, we look for these characteristics and draw upon their power to get us out of our predicament.

The Abraham component of our soul is the hidden love we have for G-d. There are times when we experience no feeling for G-d and Judaism, and then there are times when the passion for G-d is ignited. This is the love we inherited from Abraham at work.

Similarly, there are times when we need to feel the presence of G-d in our lives to help control our desires and behavior. At times, when we are inspired with a sense of awareness and reverence for G-d and His commandments, we can say that we've activated the trait of *yirah* or reverence that is embedded in our soul that we've inherited from Isaac.

The problem, however, with relying either on Abraham's "bequest" to us of love and Isaac's bequest of reverence, is that they are nor

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reliable. We cannot count on their influence at all times. Just when we need a healthy dose of passion, we may discover how the Abraham component of our soul is stifled and cannot be activated.

Moreover, even when there is passion, frequently, the passion can be channeled into some other aspect of one's life other than G-d and Judaism. In the same way that Abraham fathered Ishmael, who took Abraham's ideals and diverted them into other areas, one can take the Abraham-inspiration and squander it on some other ideal.

Indeed, in the sixties, we witnessed an entire generation who were turned-on and exhibited deep passion for all sorts of ideals, most of which we either unrelated to their Jewish roots or even those that were destructive and immoral.

Isaac's inspiration, likewise, cannot be counted on in times of need. One cannot always predict how they will fare in times of crisis. When we need to be aware of a G-dly presence the most, we may find that our Isaac-soul-component is obstructed; it does not manifest itself.

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Furthermore, even when it is activated, it may also be diverted in the wrong direction. Just as Isaac begot Esau, who strayed from Isaac's loyalty to G-d, so too, we may actually utilize the traits of Isaac for the wrong things. Witness the zealotry of certain groups in our society today who have used religious fervor as a way of hurting others.

Jacob: A Balancing Act

In the writings of Kabbalah and Chassidus, Jacob personifies the trait of balance and synthesis. The Jacob characteristic within each and every one of us is the ability to harmonize the inspiration of both Abraham and Isaac. The Jacob trait is also the voice of stability and consistency because it balances the contradictory movements of Abraham-passion and Isaac-reverence and awe, so that they do not cancel each other or go to either damaging extreme.

We can now understand why the Midrash accords greater significance to Jacob. Without Jacob, Abraham's influence would have been suppressed or squandered.

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The Power of Torah

But how do we activate the Jacob component of our souls?

Kabbalah teaches us that the study of Torah also possesses this balancing and synthesizing feature personified by Jacob. By studying Torah—particularly, its spiritual teachings and especially the parts of Torah that deal with Redemption—we draw upon the stabilizing-harmonizing-Jacob effects of our souls and bring about the reversal of the curses of exile.

The above can shed some light on the question some have concerning our preparation for the Final Redemption, which includes Torah study and Mitzvah observance:

Which is more important? Is it the performance of the Mitzvos or the study of Torah?

While both are crucial and one cannot separate one from the other, there is a difference in the way these two areas of Jewish activity gets us to the Geulah.

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Mitzvah Power

The cumulative effect of thousands of years of performing the Mitzvos have generated the Divine energy that has refined the world and paved the way for Moshiach. While Torah study generated more overt spirituality, the Mitzvos actually impacted the physical world with greater force, as explained in the classic work, the Tanya.

It is also clear that even one Mitzvah can tip the scales and bring immediate Redemption. Of all the Mitzvos, the Mitzvah of Tzedakah is most suited to break through the walls of Galus and bring Geulah, as our Sages stated: “Great is Tzedakah that it hastens the Redemption.”

However, even as we have transformed the world through these cumulative efforts, we still have a veil over our eyes and we cannot see the transformation. Our eyes are still tinted and tainted with a Galus perspective.

As we stand on the threshold of the new age of Moshiach, we now have to make the transition into a new world with new energy and see things in a new, Moshiach and Geulah

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oriented light. In the words of the Rebbe: “We have to open our eyes.”

While the world is ready for Moshiach, our minds might still be wallowing in the stifling mindset of Galus. We are pulled in both directions. One part of us is still mired in exile while the other part wants to get out of it.

This is where the preeminent power of Torah comes to the rescue. It enables us to live in a state of Geulah even in these last moments of Galus.

Torah study, in general, and learning the parts of Torah that deal with the era of Geulah in particular, have the power to alter our Galus mindset so that we live the future now.

Thus, Jacob who personifies Torah, is the primary force that we rely on to bring Redemption, for Jacob-Torah is Redemption, not just a catalyst for Redemption.

To put the above in other terms, Mitzvah observance gets us **closer** to Geulah; Torah study is living Geulah now!

ESSAY SEVENTEEN

TREES OF THE FUTURE

Moshiach will enable us to change the sub-text of our lives by revealing the inner core of our souls.

Moshiach will empower us to change the context of life by opening our eyes to see the whole picture.

Moshiach will also change the nature of the text of our lives itself by instilling more soul and vitality in our lives and actions.

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ESSAY SEVENTEEN

TREES OF THE FUTURE

Three Interpretations

What will change in the Messianic Age? In addition to the obvious changes, such as G-d's revealed presence, universal peace, the rebuilding of the Bais Hamikdash, etc., there are some startling predictions about changes to the world of nature that are alluded to in this week's parsha:

If you will go in the way of My statutes and guard My commandments and you will observe them; then I will give you your rains in their season, and the land shall yield her produce, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit.

There is an apparent redundancy in this verse. The words, "...the land shall yield her produce" refers to everything that comes from the land including trees and their fruits. Why the need

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for the additional words “and the trees of the field shall produce their fruit?”

Rashi anticipated this question and states that it refers to non-fruit-bearing trees, which will bear fruit in the future [Messianic Age].

The Midrash (*Toras Kohanim*) provides two other interpretations concerning the uniqueness of the fruits of the trees in the future Messianic Age:

In that Age the trees will yield their fruit on the same day they are planted. Furthermore, the Midrash states, in the Messianic Age the trees themselves will taste like their fruits.

In short, there are three incredible predictions concerning the trees and their fruits:

- (a) Even non-fruit-bearing trees will produce fruit.
- (b) Trees will bear their fruit on the same day they are planted.
- (c) The flesh of the trees will taste the same as their fruits.

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Three Questions

Several questions come to mind:

First, what significance is there to these miraculous changes? We know that G-d does not perform miracles needlessly. A miracle is intended to save people from a calamity, demonstrate G-d's power to non-believers, such as in the Ten Plagues in Egypt, or to introduce a new parallel spiritual energy. What purpose is served by having non-fruit-bearing trees taste like the fruits which they will bear on the same day they are planted?

Second, what is the connection between these three miracles and the Messianic Age?

Third, what relevance do these future miracles have to our lives **now**? The Tanya teaches us that all those things that will happen in the future are determined and generated by our commensurate actions today. How can we apply these supernatural changes to our lives in the present?

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Three Obstacles: Sub-text, Context and Text

To understand these three miracles, we must start by analyzing some of the primary obstacles to spiritual growth in exile that will disappear in the future. Upon reflection, we may discern three factors or patterns for which the “tree/fruit miracles” will furnish profound metaphors.

First, in the present time we can only see the surface of whatever it is that our eyes—physical or intellectual—see or perceive. No matter how deeply we probe life’s mysteries, we can only scratch the outer layers. We cannot see beyond the surface to the sub-texts of the world around us, events, personalities or even our own soul’s potential.

Second, even what we are able to see on the surface is limited in scope. When we see an event, we don’t necessarily know what preceded it or what will follow. Thus, our analysis of what we see is, by definition, incomplete and often skewed. The classic example is a blindfolded person brought into an operating room. When the blindfold is removed, he “sees” masked men standing ready to slash open an unfortunate hostage

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tied to a table. Without a proper context, our view is significantly distorted.

Finally, even if we are able to know both sub-text and context, we might still be hindered by our inability to see a consistency that underlies all things. On the macro level, we see many troubling contradictions. For example, when the good suffer and the evil prosper.

On a personal level, our positive actions often stand in stark contrast to our true inner negative feelings. The good that we do can be superficial and inconsistent. One day we will be inspired; the next day, we may be down in the dumps. This, in turn, breeds feelings of “why bother to do what is right; it won’t last; it’s insincere and nothing really makes sense.” Indeed, we may consider the entire text and narrative of our lives as either boring or a total mess.

Three Remedies

The Torah compares a human being to a fruit-bearing tree. Our fruits are the good deeds that we perform. The tree which does

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not bear fruit obviously refers to the person who lacks good deeds.

The first miracle to occur will be that **everybody** will “bear fruit.” No person will be able to suppress the innate desire to abide by G-d’s Will and do good for others. In truth, there is no such thing as a Jew without a Mitzvah. Our Sages declare, “Even the sinners of Israel are filled with Mitzvos as a pomegranate is filled with seeds.”

However, the negative energies that exist on the surface can stifle and obscure people’s innate righteousness and cause their good deeds to go unnoticed. All that one can see in these pitiful individuals during our Exile is their negative exterior.

In the Messianic Age, that façade will be stripped away and our good deeds and innate holiness will be visible for all to see. In “tree” terminology, the non-fruit-bearing trees will yield fruit.

This approach answers a question posed by commentators. If the words “the trees of the field shall yield their fruit” refers to previously non-fruit-bearing trees, why does the Torah

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use the phrase “**their** fruit?” Why didn’t the Torah omit the word “their?” It follows that while the non-fruit-bearing Jew is filled with Mitzvos, for all intents and purposes they are neither evident nor noticeable. In the Messianic Age, however, these individuals’ Mitzvos/fruits will be fully exposed.

This miracle is the antidote to the lack of sub-text. In the Messianic Age we will see the deep-rooted positive feelings embedded within each one of us.

The second miracle that will occur is that the trees will bear fruit the very same day the seeds are planted.

One of the characteristics of our exile is that we rarely see the lasting effects of our actions and, thus, fail to appreciate why we should plant our spiritual seeds. Because we do not see the true consequences of our actions—either good or its opposite—we do not take our responsibilities seriously. We do not recognize the right context for our good deeds; we don’t see what comes next and how our actions really make a difference.

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We don't realize the incredible spiritual energy that is released each time we do a Mitzvah. This lack of context will be rectified in the Messianic Age when we will see—literally and figuratively—the cosmic effects of the seeds (read: Mitzvos) that we planted in the past and that we will go on to plant in the future.

The third miracle addresses the problem of inconsistency. In the present day and age, a tree and its fruit are the very symbol of inconsistency. The tree and its fruit are in a state of contrast; one has no taste while the other's taste is wonderful.

This brings to mind the individual who has no feeling or taste for Judaism but tries to teach it to others.

Alternatively, it can refer to one who does good deeds (bears fruit) but lacks sincerity, enthusiasm and life (like a tasteless piece of bark).

In the Messianic Age that will all be remedied; the tree and the fruit will have the same taste. There will be consistency throughout the cosmos. The very text of life will come alive.

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Three Pronged Campaign: Torah Or: Toras Chesed and Toras Chaim

As we have stated, the shape of the future depends on our actions today. Our challenge now, in these last moments of exile, is to reverse the three Galus maladies by performing the “exercises” prescribed by the Torah for

- (a) changing the sub-text by revealing the inner core of our souls,
- (b) changing the context by opening our eyes to see the whole picture, and
- (c) by changing the text itself by instilling more soul and vitality in our lives and actions.

How does one achieve all of the above?

While there may be many diverse approaches that deal with each problem separately, there is one supremely straightforward approach to all of them together: the study of Torah, particularly those parts which deal with the concepts of Moshiach and Redemption.

Torah is also called Torah Or-The Torah of Light. Light has the capacity to reveal that which is hidden in darkness. This is

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particularly true of the inner and mystical dimension of the Torah transmitted by the teachings of Chassidus. Torah enlightens the inner recess of our soul and allows it to come to merge with the surface of our being. (See end of preceding essay.)

Torah is also called Toras Chesed—the Torah of Kindness. Torah focuses on the positive traits within each and every one of us and teaches us to see and speak about the positive qualities of others. That too helps them actualize their soul’s “delightful “fruits.” This is the answer to the first challenge, understanding the meaning of non-fruit-bearing trees that produce fruit.

Torah also opens our eyes to see the world in context. Through the prism of Torah, particularly the parts that deal with Redemption, all world events are illuminated. Torah helps us see how all world events—especially in recent times—are part of a Divine pattern that leads inexorably to the imminent Redemption. Torah provides us with the ability to connect the “planting of the tree” to the production of its “fruit.” Torah helps us connect the dots and see the context.

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Torah is also called Toras Chaim-the Torah of Life. It empowers us to transform the dry and tasteless tree bark that is our mechanical and perfunctory observance of the Mitzvos into joyous, exhilarating and soulful experiences. The soul of Torah animates our souls and makes our actions consistent with our inner feelings. The tree (i.e., the Mitzvos we perform with our physical beings) itself becomes a source of light and delight.

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ESSAY EIGHTEEN

UNVEIL YOUR EYES!

Vanquishing evil takes four forms:

First, doing Teshuvah with passion and love.

Second, resisting evil.

Third, study the teachings of Torah that deal
with evil.

The fourth level is to study the inner
dimension of Torah which transcends evil.

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ESSAY EIGHTEEN

UNVEIL YOUR EYES!

Zohar and Ultimate Peace

This week's parsha describes in vivid detail all of the great blessings G-d offers us for our devotion to the study of Torah and the observance of its commandments. One of the blessings that stand out is:

I will grant peace in the land, and you will go to sleep with nothing frightening you. I will eliminate wild animals from the Land and swords will not pass through your Land.

Rashi explains that the last blessing implies that an army will not even pass through our land to wage war elsewhere. So pervasive will the peace be that even the mere image of war will be removed from our sight. This is, of course, reminiscent of the famous Biblical prophecy of "turning swords into plowshares."

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This Torah reading always coincides with the Festival of Lag B'Omer—which we will be observing this Sunday—which marks the passing of the great Sage Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, the author of the Zohar, the principal work of Kabbalah.

War and Peace *Within* Torah

The connection between the Zohar and the emphasis on absolute peace that we read about in this week's parsha is that in Torah there are also two dimensions. There is a dimension of Torah that is engaged in war and a dimension of Torah that is entirely peaceful.

There are the legal aspects of Torah that deal with the realities and exigencies of life in an imperfect, discordant and even violent world. Torah addresses the world, the way it is now and not the way it will be in the future Messianic Age. Torah speaks to human frailty and decadence. In doing so, it serves a dual purpose.

First, it teaches us how to avoid getting ensnared into the impurities and vagaries of

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the material world and its vices. The laws of the Torah are meant first and foremost, to guide us through the labyrinth of undesirable paths that lead to self-destruction.

Secondly, as explained in Kabbalah and Chassidic teachings, engaging our minds in these Divine teachings that discuss worldly affairs and even evil, has the capacity to refine the world.

The Torah, by design, is commissioned by its Divine Author to “enter into” the lowliest precincts of life to help release the sparks of holiness that are held captive by the physical world. These sparks, we are told, emanate from a higher reality, but have “fallen” into and become trapped by, the constraints of the physical world. Indeed, the most potent of these sparks are deeply embedded in those things that are associated with evil and cannot ordinarily be liberated.

When dealing with neutral objects and experiences we can liberate the sparks by simply utilizing them for a higher purpose. We liberate the sparks of holiness in food by eating kosher food, with a blessing recited before and after, utilizing the energy to do

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good. The question, however, can be raised, how can we access and liberate the sparks in those objects and behaviors that are proscribed by the Torah?

Three Methods of Mining

There are actually three ways that enable us to “mine” and harness the incredible and explosive power that is embedded within evil.

The first approach to releasing the sparks contained in evil is limited to the person who has **already** transgressed by acting upon his or her impulse or spirit of rebelliousness. When this sinner begins to experience intense remorse for having distanced himself or herself from G-d, he or she arouses unprecedented feelings of love and passion for G-d.

Our Sages tell us (Talmud, Yoma 86b) that Teshuvah (usually translated as repentance, but more precisely as return) that is motivated by love has the capacity to actually transform one’s sins into virtues.

The rationale for this given in Chassidic texts (Tanya, chapter 7) is that the very energy that

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they invested in and derived from their undesirable behavior has now become the engine and fuel that transforms sinners into righteous people who now possess even greater passion for G-d than those who never sinned.

In the terminology of Kabbalah, the erstwhile sinner can actually access the heretofore inaccessible sparks of holiness. To be sure, one may never deliberately sin so he or she can later return and acquire the benefits only available to the Ba'al Teshuvah (the returnee to Judaism), as the Talmud (Yoma 85b) states: "One who says, 'I will sin and then repent' is not given the opportunity to repent."

The Power of Resistance

The second approach to liberating the sparks of holiness embedded in evil for those who tow a straight line and do not sin is the very act of resisting the temptations of evil. The energy required of us to conquer our own impulses and passions enables us to excavate even these ensconced sparks of Divine energy that are otherwise off limits. Each of these

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modes of shunning and breaking evil is the straightforward and conventional way of accessing some of the positive energy that lies latent in the objects and actions that are associated with evil.

Excavation by way of Torah Study

The third approach to liberating the hidden sparks of holiness embedded in evil which is available to all is to study the teachings of the Torah that deal with these forms of evil. For example, when we learn what the Torah has to say about theft we are given the power to unleash the hidden sparks of good held hostage to evil. And when we release the sparks, the evil actions they lose their potency. Little by little, evil loses its ability to hold sway over us.

This third method highlights the power of the revealed parts of the Torah that deal with the lowliest aspects of life.

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Transcending Evil and War

There is, however, a higher dimension of Torah; its spiritual and mystical dimension which deals with G-dly matters. In this Torah genre there is virtually no getting into the mind of evil. Even the innocuous style of questions and answers, debates and arguments that punctuate the revealed parts of the Torah hardly occur in the teachings of Kabbalah and Chassidus. This phenomenon points to the utterly peaceful and serene facet of Torah.

These two dimensions parallel the two states of war and peace. As stated, when we study the legal aspects of Torah it gives us the strength to deal with the hardships and struggles of life. It takes us into the “war zone” and provides us with the “ammunition” and wherewithal to cope with it and even help to vanquish evil.

When we study the spiritual dimension of Torah, by contrast, it helps us cultivate and nurture the part of our soul that is above and beyond the harsh realities of life—the peaceful and tranquil G-dly dimension of our identities. When we delve into this aspect of

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Torah we get a taste of the future Messianic state of peace and tranquility, in the face of which evil just evaporates. There is no need to deal with evil. There is no war. Moreover, even the image of war—represented by an armed force traveling through our land to fight elsewhere—is conspicuously absent.

This explains why the spiritual teachings of the Zohar and Chassidus are considered the means to bring about the Messianic Age, at which time we will see the fruition of the blessings of unmitigated peace. By studying these mystical teachings that help us cultivate the inner workings of our soul we help bring about the time when G-d's Essence will be fully revealed, in its wake there is only peace.

This day of Lag B'Omer, the anniversary of the passing of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, is the day that these spiritual teachings of Torah are more readily accessible to us. It was on that day over 1,800 ago that he revealed some of the most profound teachings of the Zohar and bequeathed those teachings to us.

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Gal B'Omer

The word “Lag” (in Lag B'Omer) stands for the number 33 because this day is the 33rd day in our count of 49 days from the second day of Passover to the Festival of Shavuos.

However, the same number can be represented by the word *Gal*, which means “unveil,” and alludes to the verse (Psalm 119:18) in which King David, the ancestor of Moshiach, declares:

Unveil my eyes, that I may behold
wonders from Your Torah.

King David's prayer was for G-d to remove the obstacles that would not allow him to access the spiritual dimension of Torah—its wonders. And while King David was well versed in the laws of the Torah, he wanted to experience the spiritual dimension of Torah as well.

Over twenty years ago the Rebbe spoke to us about the need to prepare for the coming of Moshiach at which time the wonders of Torah will be fully revealed. In one of his talks, the Rebbe exhorted us to, “open our eyes” as our way of bringing Moshiach.

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The Rebbe seemed to be alluding—among other interpretations—to King David’s prayer and the theme of Lag/Gal B’Omer—that we do our part to open our eyes to the spiritual teachings of Torah. This will enable us to rise above the evil associated with and dominant in Galus/exile. Thereby we will usher in the Messianic Age and the true and complete Redemption, at which time we will experience eternal peace and the transformation of evil into good and darkness into light.

ESSAY NINETEEN

EATING YOUR FATHERS AND SONS

What makes us fundamentally human is not
our intelligence and feelings.

Rather it is the interplay between them.

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BECHUKOSAI**

ESSAY NINETEEN

EATING YOUR FATHERS AND SONS

The Unthinkable!

There are two sections of the Torah where G-d admonishes the Jewish people in the harshest of terms. Actually the word “harsh” is an understatement. Some of the most unthinkable curses are mentioned as possible punishments should the Jewish people stray from the ways of the Torah. The first such account of an admonition occurs in the second of the two sections of the Torah, *Bechukosai*, we read this week.

The question has been raised: How can a compassionate father subject His children to such horrific suffering? The punishments do not seem to fit the crime no matter how far the Jewish people may have strayed.

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Hidden Blessings

This question most likely prompted our Sages, particularly the Chassidic Masters, to conclude that these curses are actually hidden blessings. They are hidden ways of stating the incredible rewards G-d has in store for us. And these hidden blessings will fully materialize at the time of the final Redemption.

Chassidic literature abounds with examples of how G-d cloaks some of the most powerful spiritual forces in unsuspecting places. Some things are just too powerful to be expressed in conventional terms. And while we may not ultimately fully comprehend why G-d chooses to do this, it remains a fact of life that we cannot judge the appearances of negativity in the Torah by their external cover. It is imperative that we search beneath the surface of these anomalous Biblical texts to find their deeper, more positive and optimistic meaning.

Creative Interpretations

With this introduction we can appreciate why many Chassidic Masters have attempted to interpret the “curses” as blessings. These

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ingenious and “creative” interpretations were not just exercises in mental gymnastics, but, rather, a sincere attempt to reveal the existence of powerful positive energy that we know lies beneath the surface. And when we discover that hidden dimension and reveal it, it helps to actualize the positive energy itself.

Eating Our Children?!

With this introduction we will attempt to discover, in this week’s parsha, the hidden positive meaning behind what is, arguably, the most horrific curse that we find in this week’s parsha:

You will eat the flesh of your sons, and
you will eat the flesh of your
daughters.

This verse poses a real challenge. How can we interpret eating our children in a positive fashion?

In addition, the verse separates sons from daughters. Why couldn’t it just state you will eat the flesh of your children, or “you will eat the flesh of your sons and daughters?”

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Allegorical Parents and Children

When we delve into Chassidic literature we discover that when the Torah speaks of fathers, mothers, sons, and daughters, it also carries an allegorical meaning.

Indeed the most essential meaning of these terms is intended to be descriptions of their spiritual sources. Only secondarily are the spiritual fathers and mothers, sons, and daughters employed as descriptions of concrete human parents and children. Indeed the physical parents and children, as everything else that is physical, derive from their spiritual counterparts.

Split Personality

In Kabbalah and Chassidic philosophy we are taught that our personalities are divided into two general categories: intellect and emotions. This is so because our soul—which is a part of G-d—descends from G-d's intellectual and emotional attributes and “inherit” these G-dly features.

When G-d created the universe, He did so with wisdom, as it says,

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The L-rd by wisdom founded the earth;
by understanding He established the
heavens. By His knowledge the depths
were broken up, and the skies drop
down the dew. (Mishlei 3:19-20)

Likewise we find that G-d employed His
emotional attributes to create and sustain the
universe:

For I said, the world was created with
kindness.” (Tehillim 83:3).

We find other emotional attributes of G-d,
such as judgment and compassion, referenced
in many Biblical verses as expressions of the
Divine in our world.

The Zohar takes the Biblical statement that
G-d created the world in six days as a
reference to the six emotional attributes of
G-d which were most instrumental in
creation. Thus the Torah does not say, “In six
days G-d created the heaven and earth,” but
rather “Six days created heaven and earth.”
The word “days” here refers to the emotional
attributes of G-d which are the source of
creation.

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Relationship between Intellectual and Emotional Faculties

Because our soul is a part of G-d it too possesses these intellectual and emotional attributes. And since our G-dly soul invests itself within our Animal soul and body, these intellectual and emotional devolve into our Animal Soul which form our personalities.

And although we are a composite of intellectual and emotional faculties, the objective is for the intellectual faculties to exercise control over the emotional ones. A child will explode in anger for the most insignificant infringement of its territory and just as quickly put it behind him or her. The child does not have the intellectual capacity to control and temper his or her emotions.

When we reflect on the different personality types we meet, there are basically three different interactions between the intellectual and emotional soul powers.

Eating Your Parents!

The lowest form is where the emotions are in total control of the intellect. When a person's

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desire for something is so strong, notwithstanding its harmful nature, he or she does not have the capacity to think straight. The emotions will not allow him or her to make the right decision and to desist from harmful behaviors. This is an example of where the emotions “eat” and “consume” the intellect.

Now in Kabbalah we are taught that the intellectual faculties are referred to metaphorically as fathers and mothers while the emotional faculties are referred to as children, sons and daughters. The reason for this imagery is that ideally the intellect can generate emotion. When a person meditates on G-d’s greatness, for example, it gives birth to a sense of awe, reverence and love for G-d.

Thus when a person’s emotions totally control the individual and his or her mind, it can be said that his or her children have “eaten” and “consumed” his or her parents.

This state of affairs describes the level of degradation to which our ancestors degenerated when they were slaves in the land of Egypt.

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Bread of Affliction

This state of affairs described the level of degradation our ancestors degenerated into when they were slaves in the land of Egypt. Thus the Previous Lubavitcher Rebbe explains the opening statement of the Passover Haggadah: “This is the bread of affliction that our fathers ate in the land of Egypt” in the following original way which alludes to the loss of their intellects' control over their emotions:

The matzah, the bread of affliction or poverty, manifested itself in the impoverished manner that our slave-ancestors “ate” their fathers (read: their intellectual faculties) in the Land of Egypt. Their impoverishment was one of loss of the ability to control their emotions. Slavery in Egypt denied them the ability to think clearly and objectively about G-d and their spiritual role.

The objective of Passover, and the subsequent period of *Sefirah* when we count the days (read: attempt to bring illumination to our emotional traits that are symbolically referred to as days) is to activate our awareness and knowledge of G-d. In this way we regain the

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control of our emotional faculties and are on the road to receiving the Torah at Sinai.

Compartmentalization

The next level of spiritual achievement, insofar as our intellect and emotions are concerned, is where our intellect and emotions stand separate. When we compartmentalize our faculties, the intellect does not shape and mold our emotions.

In this scenario, the emotions have a life of their own and will occasionally assert themselves, dulling the authority of the mind.

But the good news is that, by the same token, these emotions will not completely dominate and destroy our ability to think clearly and objectively about a certain course of action. Our minds are still capable of controlling our behavior even if they cannot control our feelings and inclinations.

This approach is obviously superior to the person who, like an animal, is totally controlled by emotion and for whom intellect is only a means to rationalize his or her errant behavior. However, as good as it may be to

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have achieved this level, it is still not the ultimate goal.

Consuming the Children in the Days of Moshiach

The ultimate goal is the third level, where the emotions are totally consumed by the intellect. This means that the emotions are in complete harmony with what is objectively proper. In theological terms this implies that the emotions of a person are in sync with his or her understanding of G-d and with G-d's interests. There remains not even the slightest expression of selfish and egotistical energy that is associated with unbridled emotion.

It is not that one's emotions, such as love and reverence, cease to exist. On the contrary, in this scenario, one does not cease to have love, for example. What changes is that the love is unadulterated, solely focused and directed at the right things. We love G-d, Torah, our fellow, and all that is objectively good. There is unity in our lives that renders our emotions pure.

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Messianic Synchronicity

This will be the ideal state of affairs we will experience in the Messianic Age. In that era, the world will be inundated with the knowledge of G-d, as the prophet Isaiah declares (cited by Maimonides at the very end of his monumental work Mishneh Torah):

And the world will be filled with the knowledge of G-d as the waters cover the sea.

But this heightened level of knowledge will also change the way we behave and even the way we feel. Thus, Maimonides states, in conjunction with that prophecy of heightened knowledge, that there will be no more jealousy and division amongst people. With our knowledge (read: our spiritual fathers and mothers, the soul's intellectual faculties) in tune with the reality of G-d's existence as will occasion the Messianic Age, our emotional faculties (read: our spiritual children) will be said to have been "eaten" and "consumed" by our "fathers." It will be a perfect and harmonious world—where all the curses associated with exile will be transformed into ultimate blessings.

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The Three Dimensions of Sefirah

The Rebbe would frequently refer to the Alter Rebbe's explanation of the relationship between *Golah*-exile and *Geulah*-Redemption. The "sole" difference between *Golah* and *Geulah* is that the word *Geulah* has an added letter *Aleph* inserted into the letters of *Golah*.

This suggests that the transformation of exile into Redemption hinges on the insertion of the aleph, which stands for *Alefo shel Olam*-Master of the World.

The Rebbe took this premise a step further; actually two steps further.

The letter Aleph actually stands for three things:

First, as stated, *Alufo shel Olam*-Master of the World.

Second, *A'alahcha*-I will educate you, and thirdly, the word Aleph rearranged spells *Peleh*-wondrous.

While the first step of *Geulah* is to recognize the role of G-d in Creation, it is limited to seeing G-d's "emotional" attributes. In human

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terms this means that we are not capable of relating to G-d on a sophisticated level.

The next dimension is to recognize G-d's "intellectual" attributes. When this occurs we have the capacity to shed light on and refine our emotions.

And the third, highest achievement, is to see G-d's wondrous, transcendent presence in the world.

These three dimensions of putting the Aleph into Golah to transform it into Geulah can be said to parallel the three periods within the counting of the Omer.

The Omer itself had to be waved in all directions. This parallels the word *Echad*-one recited in the Shema that combines all 6 directions.

The Talmud states that when we recite the word *Echad* in the Shema we should reflect on the three letters: The *Alpeh* stands for *Alufo shel Olam*-Master of the world. The *Ches*, which is the numerical value of eight represents the seven heavens and the earth (up and down). The *Daled* which is numerically four represents G-d's presence in

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all four directions. Hence the word Echad conveys the idea of G-d presence in all six directions.

There is also a custom to shake our heads in all six directions when reciting the word Echad.

This parallels the Omer offering which was waved in all six directions: G-d is one in all seven heavens and earth and in all four directions.

That represents putting the Aleph in Golah to make for Geulah. In this initial stage we recognize our Master but our character traits are still raw and unrefined.

Counting of the Omer, Sefirah, enables us to put the second level of the Aleph, the intellectual level into the emotional traits to refine them.

When do we have the potential for the third and transcendent level? When we finish counting the 49 days (representing the totality of our emotional traits as they have been refined through the exposure of the intellectual dimension). This occurs on the 50th day following the Exodus, which is the

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Festival of Shavuot, when we received the Torah at Mount Sinai. It is the eighth week; the number 8 representing that which transcends nature-it is *Peleh*.

Lag B'Omer

In truth, we can already get a sample of the third and highest level on the Holiday of Lag B'Omer, which commemorates the passing of the great Sage Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, who revealed the wonders of Torah on this day.

It has been said, that the word/number Lag-33 reversed spells *Gal*, and alludes to the words of King David in his Psalms (119):

Gal Einai-Open my eyes and I will see wonders in Your Torah.

The Kabbalists explain that when we reach the 33rd day of the counting we have essentially refined our most substantive emotional traits and we are thus ready to enter into the world of *Gal-Lag*, to taste the wonders of G-d and of Torah that will be fully manifested in the Messianic Age.

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ESSAY TWENTY

IRONCLAD

There are two visions for the Third Beis
Hamikdash.

The first is that it will be man-made. This
symbolizes how all our efforts now are the
building blocks of the Temple.

The second scenario is for it to descend from
Heaven. This symbolizes how G-d will crown
our efforts with His unparalleled holiness.

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ESSAY TWENTY

IRONCLAD

Curses or Blessings?

One of the important teachings of Chassidus is that the curses contained in the Torah, particularly the curses mentioned in this week's parsha, known as the *tochecha* (as well as in the expanded version of the *tochecha* in the book of Devarim), are really blessings in disguise. Many a Torah commentator has demonstrated that the curses that sound most painful and harsh are actually positive and sublime blessings.

In one of the apparent “curses,” the Torah states:

I will destroy the pride of your strength and I will make your skies like iron and your land like copper.

The simple meaning of this curse, according to Rashi, is that G-d will destroy our pride

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(the Bais Hamikdash-the Holy Temple) and the skies will become dry like iron, causing a drought, and the earth will exude moisture like copper that will cause the fruits to rot.

How can we possibly reinterpret this verse as a blessing?

Nourishment and Hope

The Hebrew word for breaking-*shever* is closely related to the word for nourishment and hope. This can be seen in the story of Jacob and Joseph. A famine had struck the land and food was scarce. The Torah says that Jacob “saw” that grain was being sold in Egypt. Jacob then said to his sons, “Look, I have heard that there is *shever*-grain in Egypt.” Rashi asks, why the Torah first says that he “saw?” He could not possibly have seen the grain; he just heard about it!

Rashi, citing a Midrashic commentary, answers that Jacob’s “seeing” here refers to **prophetic** vision. Jacob presciently saw that there was hope in Egypt. The Hebrew word *sever* (which contains the exactly same letters as *shever*, except that the dot is placed on the left of the

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first letter, making it a *sin* rather than on the right, which would make it a *shin*) means hope. Jacob saw not only the food that would feed his household in this period of drought and famine, but that contained within the physical nourishment was also a seed of hope that he would be reunited with his son Joseph.

Using homiletic license, one may suggest that the word in our verse “*V’shavarti*-and I will break,” can now be retranslated in a positive vein as “and I will sustain you with hope.”

Now let us read the entire phrase with this retranslation: “I will sustain you with hope for the pride of your strength.” This means that G-d will sustain your hope for the rebuilding of the Bais Hamikdash “the pride of your strength.”

The Bais Hamikdash was not just a place for people to assemble and worship the one G-d; it was also the source of our people’s pride and strength. By introducing G-d’s presence into the world, the Holy Temple engendered admiration for us from the other nations and fortified the Jewish people with spiritual and physical strength.

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Copper is a Cover

The verse continues: “and I will make your skies like iron and your land like copper.”

To understand the positive relationship of iron and copper with the Bais Hamikdash, we must refer to a discourse of the Rebbe (*Sefer Hasichos, Tenth of Teves*, 5752) on the topic of the metals used in the past and that will be used in the future Bais Hamikdash.

The three major metals used for the construction of the Mishkan (the portable Sanctuary in the desert) and the Bais Hamikdash, were gold, silver and copper. It is also known by our Sages that the three Temples correspond to the three patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Hence, the Rebbe concludes, the three Temples can also be said to correspond to gold, silver and copper.

What is the connection between Jacob and copper?

The Rebbe demonstrates that the Hebrew word for copper-*nechoshes*, contains the word *nachash*-serpent, which symbolizes the idea of *Kelipah*-the husk or power that covers and conceals holiness. And it is through Jacob,

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who personified the spiritual counterpart of *nechoshes* that we can refine this form of impurity. Jacob represents the spiritual power we require to refine the impurity of the exile in which we are presently situated and is what will become manifest in the Third Temple.

Iron in the Third Temple?

Nevertheless, the Rebbe states that the term *nechoshes* also can be used to describe the period of exile which precedes the building of the Temple. Iron is the metal that, more compellingly, alludes to the Third Temple.

Iron was not permitted to be used in the construction of the first two Temples, since it symbolizes destruction. Indeed, the destruction of the First Temple is associated with iron, as the prophet Yechezkal (4:3) was ordered to take an iron pan and place it on an iron wall which was to separate him from the city as an omen that the city would be besieged. Iron was not allowed to be used in the building of the Altar because iron swords are symbols of destruction and the Altar is a source of life.

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The Rebbe then demonstrates that iron will be an integral part of the Third Temple. It possesses a positive symbolism of steadfastness and permanence. And it is the Third Temple that will enjoy this quality of permanence. Furthermore, in the Messianic Age there will no longer be bloodshed caused by iron. Life itself will become permanent as the prophet states: “Death will be swallowed up forever, and G-d will erase tears from all faces.” Hence, iron weapons and tools of destruction will not only become obsolete or “kosher,” the metal itself will become, both figuratively and physically, an integral part of the Third Temple.

In summary: the Third Temple is associated with both copper and iron. The copper aspect, which is suggestive of the obstructive nature of evil and exile, also alludes to the refinement of these negative forces. The iron aspect suggests the introduction of a totally new dynamic; one that is solid and can never be reversed.

Based on the Rebbe’s analysis of the positive and totally novel character of iron and its role in the future Temple we have to ask ourselves

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about the source of the unprecedented status of the future Bais Hamikdash? Obviously, it derives from G-d, but the question is how will we finally access that G-dly power which was absent from the preceding two Temples.

Two Scenarios for the Third Bais Hamikdash

To understand how we will be able to take advantage of that power, we must first discuss the two scenarios for rebuilding the Third Bais Hamikdash found in the writings of our Sages:

One scenario (cited by Rashi in his commentary to the Talmud) is that the Temple will come to us from heaven “pre-fabricated.” This suggests that it will be an exclusively Divine creation (much like the first Tablets which were hewn and engraved by G-d, in contradistinction with the second Tablets which were hewn by Moses). The other scenario (codified by Maimonides) is that it will be built by the Jewish people under the leadership and direction of Moshiach.

The Rebbe reconciles both views by stating that while we will build the Temple to fulfill

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the Biblical commandment directed to every Jew, “make for Me a Sanctuary and I will dwell in them,” G-d’s Temple will “descend” and “clothe” and manifest itself within our man-made structure. We will thus enjoy the best of both worlds. On the one hand, we will be involved directly in the Temple’s construction, albeit within the spiritual limits of mortal humans; it will be our handiwork. On the other hand, we will also enjoy the transcendent quality of it being G-d’s Temple, which will endow our building project with otherworldly G-dly stability and permanence.

We may therefore suggest that the inferior “copper” aspect of the Bais Hamikdash will be achieved primarily through our human efforts. Our efforts include our present endeavors and our efforts after the Redemption commences. They will endow the Bais Hamikdash with a capacity to change the world for the good. No longer will we be plagued by the stifling influences of the *nachash*-serpent that conceal our G-dliness.

However, the more advanced and powerful “iron” aspect of the Bais Hamikdash will be introduced by G-d’s Sanctuary descending

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from on High and integrating itself within ours. This will endow the Temple with an eternal character.

Retranslation

Let us now return to our translating exercise of “curses-converted-into blessings” for the statement: “I will destroy the pride of your strength and I will make your skies like iron and your land like copper.” After all of the foregoing lengthy introduction we can now render this chilling vision in a totally novel and positive way:

“I will sustain you with hope for the pride of your strength, [the Third Bais Hamikdash] and I will give you [My] Temple [which descends from heaven, which is] like iron, and this will accompany [your efforts of building the Bais Hamikdash through earthly and physical means; symbolized by the words] your land [which, is] likened to copper.”

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Twin Preparations: Employing our Copper and Iron

The lesson of this retranslation transformation is that our preparation should be based on both elements, copper and iron.

The Rebbe, in his discourse, explains that the Patriarch Jacob is associated with Torah study. The linkage between Jacob and copper suggests, therefore, that it is Torah study that will provide us with the strength to refine the negative “copper” forces of the world in exile.

We must hasten to devote more time and energy for Torah study, and couple it with more “iron” assertiveness and unbending dedication to all that is holy. This will prepare us for the two aspects of the Third Temple, copper and iron, and finally transform the heavy curses of exile into the most sublime blessings. May we see this transformation with our eyes of flesh in the most visible and revealed fashion, now!

ESSAY TWENTY-ONE

FROM CONFESSION TO UNMITIGATED PRAISE AND GRATITUDE

Confession of sins is a surgical process.

**It cannot be accompanied by excuses, even
legitimate ones.**

**One must be brutally honest in excising every
trace of evil.**

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BECHUKOSAI**

ESSAY TWENTY-ONE

FROM CONFESSION TO UNMITIGATED PRAISE AND GRATITUDE

Punishment for Repentance?

Two sections of the Torah are extremely difficult to read with their harsh rebukes of the Jewish people. The Torah predicts the most horrible punishments for their iniquity. The first such passage is in this week's parsha *Bechukosai*.

After detailing the suffering that will befall the Jewish people when they sin, the Torah continues:

They will then confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their fathers their betrayal that they dealt Me, and that they also treated Me as happenstance.

Then I too, will treat them as happenstance and bring them into the land of their enemies. If then, their

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clogged heart becomes humbled, then,
[their sufferings] will gain appeasement
for their iniquity.

Commentators are puzzled by the fact that after the sinners confess their iniquity, G-d will still punish them by bringing them into the land of their enemies. Why would G-d not accept their confession?

Some commentators answer that their confession was not sincere or incomplete. Confession of one's sins is only as sincere as the feeling of contrition that is behind it.

The difficulty with this explanation is that the Torah does not hint of any insincerity or deficiency of their confessions.

Commentators ask a second question: Why does the Torah state that they will confess the sins of their fathers in addition for their own sins?

The Paternal Defense

The work *Divrei Yoseph* explains that by confessing the sins of their fathers, they were attempting to raise a defense of their own sins

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to have their punishment mitigated somewhat. Their defense was that they were raised by parents in a sinful environment.

However, finding a defense for our sins on the premise that we may have been influenced by our forebears can only be used when the iniquity relates to moral lapses. Parental debasement can be passed on to the next generation. However, lapses in ideology and faith are not hereditary.

Hence, when we confess our sins and invoke the iniquity of our fathers, it is only an effective defense when dealing with sins generated by moral turpitude. Lack of faith, such as not believing that G-d is involved in our lives and that all events transpire by happenstance, cannot be excused by referring to the same attitude of the parents.

Thus, the Torah states that adding their father's sins to their own in their confession would not help them because they were guilty of both moral and theological sins. Since their defense was undermined by this argument that they would have to undergo further suffering/education to understand that everything happens by Divine Providence.

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No Excuses

One may approach the two questions on a deeper level. In truth, the strategy of using one's forebears as an excuse for one's own iniquity must fail for any form of iniquity, moral or ideological.

When a person confesses his sins he cannot make excuses for them. Standing before G-d is not a time to try to offer some justification for one's crimes. One must be brutally honest before G-d and admit that his sin was totally his fault. While we should find ways of defending others, it is ill advised to do the same when we seek atonement from G-d for ourselves. We must not try to whitewash or diminish the severity of our sin if we want our confession to erase our sins.

Focusing on their father's sins could be understood as an attempt to "sneak in" some hint of justification for their iniquity. They might be intimating to G-d, "Don't blame us fully for our sins. It is not entirely our fault that we transgressed. After all, we were influenced by our fathers." While this argument has some merit, it is not a good

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idea when we hope to be completely cleansed and forgiven.

Confessional Prayer

The premise that it is improper to mention the sins of our fathers in our confession seems to be contradicted by the very text of confession we recite in our daily prayers:

Our G-d and G-d of our fathers, may our prayers come before You, and do not turn away from our supplication, for we are not so impudent and obdurate as to declare before You, L-rd our G-d and G-d of our fathers, that we are righteous and have not sinned. Indeed, we and our fathers have sinned.

It is clear from this prayer that it is indeed proper to confess our sins as well as the sins of our fathers. Why then, in our parsha, would mention of their fathers' iniquity indicate that their confession was insincere or incomplete?

Perhaps the answer may be found in the continuation of the confessional prayer, where

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we refer to 24 expressions of the sins we may have committed:

We have transgressed, we have acted perfidiously...

No further mention is made of our forebears' sins. It follows then that if the defense based on our father's sins is followed by a brutally honest and unqualified confession of our own sins, the earlier confession of our father's sins is not seen as intent to whitewash our own. On the contrary, it is intended to **remove** the defense that G-d should ignore our iniquity for the sake of our righteous forebears, for they too were iniquitous.

Alternatively, some suggest that by confessing our fathers' sins we bring them a measure of atonement.

The Chassidic classic *Panim Yafos* explains (based on the writings of the Ari and the Zohar) that the reference here is not to our biological fathers but to earlier incarnations of our own soul. When we confess our sins we must ask for forgiveness for our soul in all its antecedent states.

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Reach In and Touch our Mind

Chassidic thought considers a father and mother as metaphors for our intellectual faculties. Accordingly, we may suggest another interpretation of our confession for our fathers' sins. It's not sufficient for us to recognize that our evil impulse and our weak emotional state got the best of us and brought us down. We must also extend responsibility to our minds. We must dig deep into our thought processes to discover the distorted way we have viewed the world and our role in it.

If we merely try to remove the emotional causes of our transgressions we still haven't treated the sin at its source, which is our mind and mindset.

Hence, in the confessional prayer we start by addressing the immediate cause of our iniquity: "we sinned." The "we" here refers to us, to our basic personalities which describe our emotional gestalt. If we think honestly about what drives us most of the time we see that it is our emotions. However, that is not a sufficient recognition of why we sinned. We

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must go deeper within our psyche to find the intellectual source of our deviations.

Upon further reflection we will see that our daily confession is significantly different from the confession mentioned in this week's parsha. The parsha speaks of confessing our **intentional** sins (*avonam*), whereas our daily prayers refer to our unintentional sins (*chatanu*).

This probably explains why the confession mentioned in our parsha was not considered adequate. When we deal with confession it is not sufficient to recognize the intentional sins and their intellectual source. By omitting the unintentional sins the repentant sinner shows that he has not dug deeply enough into the root causes of his negligence and insensitivity.

Geulah: Fully Baked Confession and Gratitude

A half-baked confession which does not confront the root of one's transgression is a symptom of Galus. As explained in Chassidic thought, Galus is a force that primarily obstructs the mind and mindset of the Jew. As

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a result of this Galus condition, even when we confess our sins the confession is incomplete.

But we can remedy that shortfall. When we engage our minds with the Torah's uninhibited and refreshing way of thinking it removes the obstructive force that distorts our intellectual vision. And while all teachings of Torah illuminate the mind, the teachings that relate to the period of Geulah are particularly effective in reaching in to our minds, "our fathers", and confessing or correcting their inadequacies.

It is interesting to note that the word for confession, "*viduy*," is cognate to the word "*hoda'ah*"-gratitude.

The lack of full awareness of who we are and what causes us to stray also prevents us from fully appreciating G-d's gifts to us. When we reach every part of our psyche and thereby remove even the smallest traces of evil and insensitivity, we will be able to give full praise and gratitude to G-d. Thus, unadulterated gratitude characterizes the Messianic Era. In that time there will be no part of us that must be atoned for and straightened out. With all of our faculties functioning with full

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BECHUKOSAI**

force, we will be able to join, unhindered, the
symphony of thanksgiving!

ESSAY TWENTY-TWO

INSULATION

Torah, among all of its other qualities, is also
the best insulation from all the negative forces
in the world.

**LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – BEHAR-
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ESSAY TWENTY-TWO

INSULATION

Double Trouble!

There are two times during the year that we read a parsha that contains numerous threats and curses, known as the *Tochecha*. Once, in this week's parsha of *Bechukosai*, before the Festival of Shavuot, and the second time in *parshas Ki Savo*, before the Holiday of Rosh Hashanah.

Granted that there is a need to hear harsh words of rebuke from a loving G-d, in the spirit of what is now referred to as "tough love," but why twice and why just before these two holidays?

Concerning the reading of the curses before Rosh Hashanah, the Talmud explains that it is to express the sentiment that the year should end with all of its curses. But what about Shavuot, the anniversary of the giving of the Torah? Here too the Talmud answers that

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indeed Shavuot is also a Rosh Hashanah, it is the day when the trees are judged.

On a more mystical level one can offer the following analysis of the two readings of the curses and the specific meaning of the reading before Shavuot.

Destroying Negative Energy

There are two ways of getting rid of the negative energies that we have generated through our behavior, which is really what the curses are all about. One way is to turn a new leaf, start a new life and forget about the past. The second approach is to find a method of insulation that will protect us from the negative influences.

Rosh Hashanah as the beginning of a new year, allows us to put the negativity of the past year behind us. It is like when a person begins a new job, with a new employer, in a new community whereby one's past misdeeds and imperfection does not count. As long as we try our best with the new job, we have nothing to worry about our "baggage" that we left behind.

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In the middle of the year, we cannot do that. We are still in the same job, with all of the conditions remaining more or less intact. How then do we extricate ourselves from the quagmire of negativity that we often find ourselves mired in? Do we have to wait for Rosh Hashanah?

And the answer to this question is provided by this week's Parsha that precedes the anniversary of the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai. Torah is identified with blessing. As our Sages of the Jerusalem Talmud explain that the reason the Torah begins with the letter Beis, rather than the letter Aleph, is because Beis is the initial of Beracha which means blessing. The very last Mishnah, the compilation of the Oral Torah, also deals with the notion of blessing. Before his wedding, a groom gets called up to the Torah, because it will bless his marriage.

Thus, by entering into the realm of Torah, by enveloping ourselves with the aura of Sinai, the ultimate source of blessing, we become impervious to all the negativity that might have been generated, since the beginning of the year.

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Two Functions of Messianic Age

The curses that are discussed in this week's Parsha represent the suffering that we have endured throughout our duration in exile. The Redemption that we have been praying for all these years is what will bring an end to these curses.

From the above analysis we can say that there are two functions of the Messianic Age. The first is to bring an end to the curses of exile by introducing a new and unprecedented measure of Divine light. In the new Age, all the curses of the past will disappear.

But, in addition there is also another effect of Moshiach. Moshiach, who will usher in this age, is the ultimate teacher of Torah. By exponentially increasing the knowledge of Torah, Moshiach will enable us to become enveloped in the ultimate source of blessing, the blessing of Torah that will shield us from all that which is negative and introduce us to all that which is positive.

ESSAY TWENTY-THREE

ETCHED IN STONE

**Torah study is the preeminent influence in
our lives.**

Mitzvos are external; Torah is internal.

**While Mitzvos make us holy, Torah study
defines us.**

**LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – BEHAR-
BECHUKOSAI**

ESSAY TWENTY-THREE

ETCHED IN STONE

Redundancy

This week's Torah portion of Bechukosai begins with the following statement:

If you shall follow My Statutes and
keep My commandments... then I will
give you rains in their season...

Rashi notes the redundancy in this verse. What is the difference between following G-d's statutes and keeping His commandments?

Rashi's answer is that the reference to Statutes is not to the commandments but to the toil in the study of Torah.

The question still persists. Why would the Biblical text refer to the intellectual pursuit of Torah study as "following G-d's statutes?" Is this not a term usually reserved for those commandments which are not based on rational thought?

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Difference between Torah and Mitzvos

The answer lies in the root of Hebrew word for statutes: "Chukim," or, as it appears in this week's Torah portion: "Bechukosai," which is "engraved," or "etched in stone." This can have a dual meaning. It could refer to a Divine order which is issued without reason or explanation. For those who might resist their observance, the Torah refers to them as Chukim, as if to say, "these commandments are etched in stone and cannot be changed to suit one's intellectual preferences.

There is, however, a deeper meaning to the concept of a commandment being "engraved." Words which are written or printed on paper are separate from the paper. Words engraved in stone, by contrast, are an integral part of the surface in which they are etched.

This describes the difference between a Mitzvah and Torah study. When we observe a Mitzvah, no matter how enthusiastic and committed we are, it is always something we do, not something we are.

When we toil in the study of Torah, however, the words and ideas of Torah become

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indelibly imprinted on and engraved within our mind and soul. We do not just act Torah, we become Torah. When this occurs, the observance of the commandments which follow are on a totally higher level than the Mitzvos observed without prior study.

The lesson is obvious. Judaism is not content with the strongest commitment to doing good. The Torah demands of us to employ our minds in the dedicated study of Torah, to the extent that we become "walking Torah's." Our very being becomes one of refinement and holiness, making all of the Mitzvos we perform more meaningful and exciting.

Preparation for Geulah

This also explains why the best preparation for the future Redemption is Torah study.

Whereas a Mitzvah has the power to save the world; Torah saves the person from the intrusion of exile forces. Only Torah which becomes an inseparable part of our identity can take our minds out of the Galus perspective and Galus mentality.

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ESSAY TWENTY-FOUR

FAIR FEAR

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ESSAY TWENTY-FOUR

FAIR FEAR

Anxiety and Fear

One of the most difficult readings of the Torah can be found in this week's parsha; it is known as the *tocha'cha*—the harsh words of rebuke. (An even more gruesome follow up can be found in the Book of Deuteronomy.) These words of rebuke are also characterized by the Torah as curses. But, Torah is the source of all good and blessing. Indeed, the Talmud explains that the reason the Torah begins with the letter beis is because it is the initial of the word beracha, which means blessing. This opening letter sets the tone for the entire Torah.

This raises the obvious question: How do we understand the Torah's use of dire threats and horrible curses if Torah epitomizes blessings?

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One of the answers to this question lies in the understanding that the curses, from the vantage point of the Torah, are challenges to us. It is as if the Torah commands us: "Take these curses and convert them into blessings!" But in order to transform a curse, one must know what they are, and where they come from.

A cursory survey of all these dire threats delineated in this week's parsha yields an unmistakable conclusion: fear and anxiety from real and imaginary threats are the most frightening prospects for our people. The real fears derive from suffering, persecution, famine and other natural and man-made disasters that the Torah lists. But, arguably, the most extreme form of fear is outlined in the second part of the following verse:

And those who hate you shall rule over you; and you shall flee when none pursue you.

In today's world we can see how this curse has come true. There is a penchant, to the point of obsession that many have, induced and exacerbated to a certain extent by the media, to search for and exaggerate the

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threats to our well-being. Whether it is the fear of meteors, SARS, UFO's, Mad Cow Disease, Global warming, nuclear proliferation, Aids, the Russians, ISIS or the multitude of other diseases and concerns, our society has been conditioned to worry.

To be sure, there is a need to be aware of certain dangers that lurk in our midst so that we can take action to prevent these situations from degenerating into a real catastrophe. But in this "information age," when we are bombarded hourly with every tragedy and threat from every corner of the world, it is a major challenge to sort out the genuine and imminent threats from the trivial ones. Fear becomes the norm.

It is bad enough to be petrified when being pursued by those who hate us and wish us harm, but why do we fear and flee in terror when no one is really pursuing us? Why do we look for fear? And, more importantly, how do we treat it?

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The Root of Fear

To answer this question it is important to trace the emotion of fear to its roots in our G-dly soul. Only then can we discover a means how we can tap into the incredible energy generated by and inherent in the emotion of fear.

There are two conventional ways one can approach these phobias: The first is to demonstrate to ourselves that they are without foundation, and the second is to actually confront them.

For example, if one is afraid of contracting Mad Cow disease, all they have to do is read how the probability to get it is virtually nil. If the fear is of flying, all one has to do is actually fly until they no longer harbor that fear.

In truth, Jewish mystical literature teaches us that there is a third approach to treating fear and anxiety that involves recognizing the harmless source of that fear and attempting to express it in the way it was intended.

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To explain: Our G-dly soul possesses two forces and drives that are, paradoxically, antithetical and complementary.

One part of the G-dly soul longs to return to its maker. It is consumed with love of G-d because it is a part of the Divine and because it senses and appreciates the love and closeness of G-d towards us. This love and passion is the root and generator of love that we experience in our physical lives as well.

But, there is another part of the G-dly soul that senses the awesome majesty and infinitude of the Divine that imbues the soul with a sense of overwhelming awe and reverence. This exclusively spiritual experience that is natural to the Divine soul within us, known in Hebrew as *yirah*, is a distant cousin of fear, or, more precisely, is its ancestor.

Fear is an emotion that makes us recognize our vulnerability. Faced with fear, even the greatest and toughest among us will cower. As stated, this emotion of fear is rooted in the soul's profound humility and self-abnegation that is borne out of an acute awareness of the infinite and transcendent nature of the Almighty G-d.

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When the soul becomes garbed within a physical body, the sublime spiritual feelings are strongly tempered and made much more down-to-earth. Thus the soul's state of utter self-abnegation and profound reverence can evolve and degenerate into a state of fear and dread for real and even imaginary threats.

When a person is overcome with inordinate fear and anxiety, in addition to seeking professional help which the Torah encourages for any health problem, it is helpful to reflect on the source and root of that fear; that it originates in the soul. And at its root it is a positive and holy emotion.

And when we take our fears and recognize that they are, in essence, expressions of reverence and awe for G-d, and when we couple that realization with behaviors consonant with it, that will remove those elements of our nature that distort the pristine emotion of the soul, which produce the painful and debilitating feelings of fear.

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Pain of the Soul

In addition, the feelings of fear can be the soul's way of expressing pain when its needs are neglected. The soul becomes apprehensive when it sees how we deny its needs. To assuage the fear, we must do those things that the soul craves: Study Torah, put on Tefillin, pray, help another, light a Shabbos candle, keep kosher, observe the Holidays with joy, etc. The soul, seeing that its needs are being met, will lose some of the anxiety and angst that it felt when it was being ignored.

Moshiach: The Cure for Fear

The “curses” that we read in this week's parsha are associated with exile. Obviously, with the advent of the coming of Moshiach and the ultimate Age of Redemption, the fear and anxiety that plagues our society will be removed. Our Biblical Prophets spoke of how during the Messianic Age we will be overwhelmed with the awareness of G-d. This, in turn, will generate the healthy form of *yirah* that will remove the curses that come when the source of fear in the soul is

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obscured. In addition, the soul's needs will be fulfilled that will negate any possibility for fear and anxiety.

ESSAY TWENTY-FIVE

NO MORE VICTIMS

Torah helps us look for the good in everyone
and everything.

Even adversity is seen as hidden good.

The Messianic Age will change our focus to
see all the hidden good fully revealed.

**LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – BEHAR-
BECHUKOSAI**

ESSAY TWENTY-FIVE

NO MORE VICTIMS

Tough Love

One of the least "popular" readings of Torah is this week's selection, which describes the harsh suffering that would befall the Jewish people in the event that they stray from the teachings of the Torah. It goes without saying that despite the way it sounds to us, all the words of the Torah are equally holy and positive. Even when the words sound harsh, since they are in the Torah, which is described by King Solomon as, "Its ways are pleasant and all of its paths are peace," we are compelled to conclude that beneath the harsh exterior lays a hidden positive meaning.

One approach to understanding the positive nature of this selection known as the "*tochacha*-words of rebuke" is that when G-d transforms all of the curses into blessings, the blessings will be so incredible, precisely

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because they came from the most horrific curses. While we would settle for fewer blessings if we knew that that would eliminate the curses, G-d, in His infinite and unfathomable wisdom chooses otherwise. So we are left with the request to G-d, "Please transform the curses of the past into the most exquisite blessings."

There is another approach to the understanding of the "curses" based on the fact that the Hebrew text allows us to translate and interpret each and every curse as a blessing.

Baseless Anxiety

In today's message we will discuss one such verse; first with the standard translation and then with a more creative and positive one.

...and you shall flee when no one will pursue you.

The simple meaning of the text is clear. One of the greatest curses is when a person is filled with anxiety and there is no reason for it. It is worse when it causes the person to flee and can never find rest.

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A Chassidic master translated the same phrase in a positive fashion, but first a brief introduction is in order:

Don't Wallow in Victimhood

King Solomon in Ecclesiastes states: "G-d looks out for the one who is pursued." One interpretation of this verse is that G-d looks out for the downtrodden and victimized individuals.

There are some people who take this verse to undesirable extremes and developed a cult of victimization. They wallow in their own suffering and their sole claim to G-d's relationship with them is their status as one who is being pursued and threatened by others.

Indeed, the Jewish people have been the perennial victims and for that alone we are entitled to G-d's protection and love. But there is danger in relying on being a victim for our connection to G-d. There is great danger in putting inordinate emphasis on taking up for the victim because in some cases we forget about who is right and who is

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wrong, and instead look at the one who is weaker and assume that he or she is right just because they are the underdog.

When Israel was yet a fledgling entity and its very existence was in peril, the Western world seemed to have supported Israel. But when Israel won the Six Day War and subsequent military victories, the tables were turned. Many people and countries began to look at the losing side as the one's that had to be supported. Israel was vilified only because they had the chutzpah to win!

There is a story told of a prominent European personality who supported Israel before the Six Day War. After the Israeli victory he complained: "I was convinced they would lose; that's why I supported them."

While being a victim does entitle you to more compassion and support, even from G-d, it is far better to earn G-d's protection when we are not victims. It is preferable to earn G-d's love when we do what is good, defend our ourselves, and focus on our purpose in this world to be a force that influences it for the good. In this positive way we earn G-d's love on a much higher level than if we simply lay

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claim to G-d's beneficence because we are the victim.

Let's Not Define Ourselves by our Suffering

But Judaism is anything but cynicism and pessimism. No matter what, we have never forgotten, and we dare not forget, the promises the Torah has made to us that G-d will take us out of exile and bring about the Redemption.

All of our suffering in the past has turned many of us into cynics and pessimists. Understandably, we have focused much of our attention on the Holocaust and the untold misery it has brought. But, as important as it is to never forget the past, we must not allow our existence to be defined by our suffering.

When we raise children thinking that the defining feature of their Jewish heritage is anti-Semitism and suffering, they will be deprived of the much more desirable role of the Jewish people as a "Nation of priests and a holy people," and a "Light to the Nations."

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“You shall be Elevated; Not, You shall Flee”

Now let us return to the foregoing Biblical "curse" and see how it has been retranslated in light of the above:

Instead of translating the Hebrew word "*v'nastem*" as "you shall flee," the word can be translated as "and you shall be elevated." So now the verse reads: "And you shall be **elevated** when no one shall pursue you."

This verse takes on a completely new and refreshing meaning: Even when you will not be pursued and you are no longer a victim, you will be elevated. Your relationship with G-d will not depend on your status as a victim. You will no longer have to quote Ecclesiastes to enjoy G-d looking out for you.

Living in Galus has so conditioned us to expect adversity and to look for theological explanations for it.

Now, as we stand on the threshold of the Messianic Era, we have to recondition ourselves to expect positive experiences and to touch G-d's infinite kindness in the most revealed fashion.

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May we see the complete realization of this
imminently with the coming of Moshiach.

**LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – BEHAR-
BECHUKOSAI**

ESSAY TWENTY-SIX

TWO TIERED EVALUATION

Self-Discovery is an exciting experience
because it reveals a surprising subterranean
dimension of our personality.

However, the ideal is that we don't give up
our familiar, conscious, and external identities.

**LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – BEHAR-
BECHUKOSAI**

ESSAY TWENTY-SIX

TWO TIERED EVALUATION

Blessings and Evaluations

This week's parsha – Bechukosai – is known for its blessings and what appear to be the opposite of blessings. The blessings are promised by G-d for devotion to the teachings of the Torah and the opposite effects for breaching its dictates.

Immediately following these blessings and “curses” the Torah continues with the laws of *erachin*-evaluations. These laws allow for one to pledge to the Holy Temple fund, by offering to give one's own “value,” or the value of another. The Torah then proceeds to give fixed values for people based on gender and age.

Since everything in the Torah is precise, commentators wonder why the Torah juxtaposed the blessings and “curses” with the laws of evaluations.

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We have Value!

One explanation is that after hearing all the dire predictions for failure to adhere to the commandments, and especially after we have tragically witnessed the suffering and pain associated with exile, it could lead one to assume that they have no value. One could erroneously conclude that G-d is unhappy with who we are and regards us as absolutely worthless beings, devoid of all value.

To dispel this negative reaction to the section dealing with the blessings and the curses, the Torah continues with the laws of evaluations, which underscore that even, nay especially, with regard to the Holy Temple, G-d assigns value to everyone.

It is interesting that there is a paradoxical aspect of the laws of evaluations. On the one hand the evaluations are identical for all people of a particular gender and age, and yet, on the other hand, there are differences based on gender and age.

This raises the obvious question: If the Torah wanted us to think that we all have intrinsic value it should have given all genders and ages

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the same value. Why the paradoxical emphasis on equal value for all within one gender and age, while differentiating between genders and age? And what lesson can we draw from this paradox?

Fire and Brimstone or Love

When we listen to diverse spiritual guides we often hear two diametrically opposing views about the status of a person who sins.

On one side we have the fire and brimstone preacher that chastises, castigates and threatens all sorts of punishment and suffering for failure to remain faithful to G-d's laws. This approach was quite common in the days before the Ba'al She Tov, the founder of the Chassidic movement.

On the other side, we have the soothing mentor who assures us that we are all basically good people and that G-d loves us unconditionally.

The Torah, in its presentation of the laws of evaluations in the context of blessings and "curses" provides a third and more nuanced and complete picture of how G-d views us.

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Certainly, the latter position that G-d loves us unconditionally is true. It is because we all possess a Divine spark that is our true essence. We are all descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, who have bequeathed to all of their children the qualities of love, reverence and compassion.

However, we also possess an entire super-imposed personality structure comprised of intellect and emotions that generates a host of opinions and feelings that may or may not be in consonance with our essential G-dly identity. The existence of this other layer of our personalities yields both positive and negative effects.

On the positive side, the added on personality is what gives us our individual identities and the means to differentiate ourselves from others, so that each of us can impact the world in a unique way.

On the negative side, the added on personalities that we possess can also conceal our inner identity and actually lead us astray. Furthermore, the emphasis on our individualism can spin out of control and lead to fragmentation and discord.

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The External is Also Valuable

This is why the laws of evaluations possess a paradoxical nature. It is intended to teach us that though on one level no matter how far we stray, G-d never truly abandons us because of who we are in essence. It proclaims to us that we have intrinsic value.

Yet, by setting up the system of evaluations wherein there are differences in our value based on external factors such as gender and age, the Torah wants us to be mindful of the way the external personality is also an important aspect of who we are and how we relate to G-d and how G-d relates to us.

Moshiach the Evaluator

The section dealing with the blessings and “curses” concludes with G-d’s promise to remember His covenant with our forebears. This implies that the exile will end and G-d will return us to our land and restore His relationship with us and usher in the Age of Redemption.

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The fact that the laws of evaluations are connected to the Messianic promise suggests a connection between them.

One connection is that Moshiach, the Jewish leader the Torah tells us who will usher in this age, is a person who applies the lesson of evaluation to himself and to the way he relates to others.

Moshiach, first and foremost, must be a person who constantly evaluates himself to see that all of his actions are consistent with the teachings of the Torah; that his external personality is a reflection of his inner essence.

Moshiach then becomes a great leader who simultaneously sees the good in everyone even as he makes demands that our external personalities should not conflict with our inner good.

Moshiach appreciates the unifying aspect of all Jews and he will therefore succeed in gathering all Jews and bring them to the Land of Israel.

However, Moshiach must also value the external aspects of all Jews and that which distinguishes them from one another.

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If Judaism is full of paradoxes, the Messianic Age and Moshiach are expressive of the ultimate paradox of seeing the underlying unity in all even as the external differences are not neglected.

Indeed, Moshiach will enable us to get in touch with our inner Divinity and goodness but he will not strip us of our more familiar external selves.

**LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – BEHAR-
BECHUKOSAI**

ESSAY TWENTY-SEVEN

LIGHT, LIFE AND HOLINESS

Judaism focuses on generating light,
preserving life and sanctifying the world.

These three objectives are fulfilled by women
observing three special Mitzvos of lighting
Shabbos and Yom Tov candles, family-purity
and the separation of Challah.

**LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – BEHAR-
BECHUKOSAI**

ESSAY TWENTY-SEVEN

LIGHT, LIFE AND HOLINESS

The Unusual Spelling of Jacob?

At the end of the harsh words of rebuke in this week's parsha, G-d promises the Jewish people that He will not abandon them.

"I will remember My covenant with Jacob, and My covenant with Isaac too. I will also remember My covenant with Abraham, and I will remember the Land."

Rashi observes that the Jacob's name is spelled with an extra letter *vov*. This is an aberration, for in virtually all the other places where Jacob's name is mentioned it is spelled without the extra *vov*.

Rashi points to five other exceptions to the rule and observes that the prophet Elijah's name, which is usually spelled with a *vov*, is

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missing the *vov* in five places and that there is a connection between these two anomalies. Jacob “appropriated” the letter *vov* from Elijah as collateral securing that he would come and announce the Redemption of his (Jacob’s) children.

Why was it necessary for Jacob to take Elijah’s *vov* five times and why specifically did he take the letter *vov*?

Rabbi Shlomo Ganzfried, author of the classic *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch*, in his commentary on the Torah, *Aperion* (Cited in the anthology *Yalkut Moshiah U’Geulah*), suggests that the five references hint to the fact that Elijah will make five announcements concerning the Final Redemption.

However, this too, must be explored to be fully understood. Why would it be necessary for Elijah to make five announcements?

Liberation of Five Levels of Soul

One possible explanation lies in the nature of Galus-exile. Physical exile is a representation

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of the spiritual exile of our souls. Our G-dly soul has only a limited ability to express itself because we are in an internal exile.

There are five levels of the soul, each of which must be liberated from exile and allowed to freely express itself.

To understand the significance of the liberation of these five levels it is necessary to describe their function and how they differ from one another.

The lowest level of the soul is called *nefesh*. It is responsible for the practical aspects of our lives. The *nefesh* of our G-dly soul is what motivates us and enables us to act in accordance with G-d's will.

In exile, that motivation is often impaired or even lacking because Galus is a desensitizing force. Galus removes the motivation and dedication that a Jew would normally have if the *nefesh* was left to its own devices.

Elijah's first announcement thus paves the way for the *nefesh* to be liberated and our motivation for Jewish practice heightened. When a Jew feels the inspiration to do more it

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may very well be a sign that Elijah has made that announcement and one's *nefesh* is in the process of being liberated.

The next level of the soul is called *ru'ach*, which is responsible for our emotions. When a Jew is filled with love or awe for G-d, it is the *ru'ach* of our G-dly soul that is behind that emotion. In exile our emotions are occluded. While we might be able to motivate ourselves to do a Mitzvah, it may lack the love and reverence that the G-dly soul's *ru'ach* has for G-d and His commandments.

Elijah's second announcement then sets into motion a process that allows our spiritual emotions to emerge. Thus, when a Jew feels passion or any other strong feeling for G-d, another person, a Mitzvah, Torah study, etc., it may portend that one's personal redemption, along with the entire world's Redemption, is right around the corner.

The next level of the soul is called *neshomo* (which is also the generic name for soul). The *neshomo* is responsible for our ability to understand G-dliness and for our mortal minds to grasp the Divine teachings of Torah.

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In exile we experience a mental block as far as Torah is concerned. While we may be able to understand secular knowledge, there can still be a formidable impediment to the grasping of anything spiritual and Divine.

Elijah's third announcement thus unleashes the mechanism for our G-dly soul's *neshomo*-intellectual potential to freely absorb all of this Divine knowledge.

The next level is called *chaya*, which is responsible for the soul's ability to exercise unbridled and unlimited will-power to follow G-d's commandments, no matter the obstacle. When a Jew was prepared to give his or her life for Judaism it was the *chaya* aspect of his or her soul that asserted itself. In exile this power can be covered up by the darkness of our condition.

Elijah's fourth announcement thus prepares us for the liberation of this level, which provides us with the will-power to surmount any obstacle to the fulfillment of G-d's will.

The fifth and final level of the soul, called *Yechidah*, is the spark of G-dly energy within

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the soul that contains a spark of the Divine itself. This level, when activated, goes even beyond will-power. It represents the soul's complete inability to do anything that hampers its relationship with G-d. Is it often identified with the soul's very essence, which is one with G-d.

While in the level of Chaya one feels the need to sacrifice comfort, money and even life for a Higher purpose, the unmasked *Yechidah* acts effortlessly and automatically; it simply cannot be any other way.

This fifth level is the one identified most with Moshiach and it is uncovered by Elijah when he makes his fifth and final announcement.

Adam Degraded Himself and His Progeny in Six Ways

Now that we have some explanation why the *vov* of Elijah was taken as collateral five times—to ensure that he empowers us to liberate all five levels of our soul—we now have to understand the significance of the letter *vov* in particular.

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The aforementioned *Aperion* finds an answer to this question by referring to a Midrashic comment that the letter *vov* is also missing from the word *toldos* (generations, children) except in two places. The two exceptions are the verse in Genesis which describes the world upon the completion of creation: “These are the generations of the heavens...” and “These are the children of Peretz...”

The Midrash explains that the *vov* is missing from all but these two aforementioned places due to the fact that when Adam sinned he dramatically altered the perfect nature of the world in six different ways, the numerical value of the letter *vov*. The first mention of *toldos*-generations in Genesis contains the letter *vov* because it was prior to Adam’s fall, when the world still enjoyed an untarnished identity.

Likewise, in the Messianic Age the world will revert back to its state of perfection as Adams sins will have been rectified. Thus the verse that speaks of the generations of Peretz, a nickname for Moshiach, uses the full form of the word *toldos*.

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What are the six changes that Adam's sin imposed which will be restored with Elijah and Moshiach?

The Midrash lists the following six items:

His radiance, life, height, produce, fruit, and the luminaries.

Prior to his sin, Adam's face radiated a G-dly aura. This will return for all of humanity with the coming of Moshiach.

When G-d instilled the breath of life into Adam it was with the intention that he be immortal. That changed when Adam sinned and brought death to the world. In the Messianic Age, when "death will be swallowed up forever," we will enjoy eternal life.

Adam's height is described as reaching from earth to heaven. Metaphorically speaking, this means that there were no barriers between heaven and earth in his consciousness. That lofty stature was lost upon his sin but will be restored in the Messianic Age.

Adam's sin also affected the earth's produce and the fruit of the trees. When we fail and

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degrade ourselves the entire world experiences degradation as well. Elijah and Moshiach will restore the integrity and vibrancy of the agricultural processes, as well as all aspects of nature.

Likewise, the light that G-d created on the first day, which enabled one to see from one end of the world to the other, became concealed as a result of Adam's sin. It will be restored in the Messianic Age.

The Three Special Mitzvos Entrusted to Women

To sum up the words of the Midrash, Moshiach will restore, light (both Adam's radiant face and the light of the world), life (an end to human death and completion of the life of produce) and unification of heaven and earth-holiness.

These three elements are the same three special Mitzvos that were entrusted mainly to women: Lighting Shabbos and Holiday candles, guarding family purity-Mikveh and

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separation of Challah from our dough (and, by extension, keeping all the laws of Kashrus).

It is easy to see the correlation between lighting the Shabbos candles and restoration of the G-dly light.

It is also easy to understand the connection between separation of Challah and bringing heaven and earth together. Food is a metaphor for all the physical and material things in our lives. When we separate challah (and keep kosher in general) we bring holiness into our earthly and mundane affairs; we bring heaven and earth together.

How do we connect Mikveh with the restoration of eternal life?

The primary function of the Mikveh is the ritual purification of a woman after her monthly period (which represents a loss of potential life). G-d's presence is overtly present when there is vibrant life.

When we experience a loss or curtailment of life, such as during sleep, our bodies enter a state of pause. G-d's presence is suppressed.

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Upon awakening we therefore wash our hands with water, the source of life.

In some instances, as when there is a loss of potential life for a woman, the purification and restoration process requires immersion in a Mikveh, which has been likened, among other metaphors, to the amniotic fluid, symbolizing rebirth and rejuvenation.

Indeed, our Sages tell us that beginning with the Matriarch Sarah it is the role of our women in particular to rectify Adam's sin by engaging especially in these three areas of light, life and holiness. This will lead and condition us for the imminent Redemption, when we will see uncompromised light, life and holiness!