

INSIGHTS

Into The Weekly Parsha

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This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of
Yosef ben Yaakov. "May his Neshama have an Aliya!"

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Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

PARSHAS BECHUKOSAI

Food, Glorious Food

I will provide the rains in their proper time and the land will give its produce and the tree of the field will give its fruit...You will eat your bread to satiety and dwell securely in your land (26:4-5).

This week's *parsha* begins with the incredible rewards for adhering to Hashem's Torah and fulfilling His *mitzvos*. The *parsha* continues with one of the Torah's two *tochachos* – the admonishments outlining the terrible consequences for not following the proper path to Hashem and the Torah.

One of the main themes of both the blessings that result from following the Torah and *mitzvos* and, conversely, the consequences for not following them is the great abundance or the severe shortage of food. In fact, one of the most horrific elements of the *tochacha* – “*You will eat the flesh of your sons, and the flesh of your daughters*” (26:29) – is an outcome of a persistent shortage of food.

In addition, the Torah describes that one of the blessings is “*you will eat your bread to satiety*” (26:5), and one of the curses is “*you will eat and not be sated*” (26:26). Rashi (ad loc) explains this isn't referring to a quantity of food, this is referring to how the food satisfies the body. In other words, if we follow the Torah and *mitzvos* our bodies will be sated by the food we eat, if we do not follow the Torah and *mitzvos* then our bodies will not find satisfaction in the food we eat. How are we to understand this concept?

The Rema (*Orach Chayyim* 292:2)

states, “We are accustomed not to organize a study session [on Shabbat afternoon] between *mincha* and *ma'ariv* [so that people will have time for *Shalosh Seudos*], but we do recite *Pirkei Avos* in the summer.”

So every week between *Pesach* and *Shavuos* we read one *perek*. This week we read the fifth *perek*, which begins: “With ten utterances the world was created” (*Avos* 5:1). This refers to the concept of Hashem creating through speech (e.g. “*and Hashem 'said' 'let there be light.'*” (*Bereishis* 1:2)). The tenth and final utterance according to the Vilna Gaon (ad loc) and Maharal (*Gevuros Hashem* 57) is when Hashem told man, “*I have given you every seed bearing plant and fruit and it shall be for you for food*” (*Bereishis* 1:29).

In other words, Hashem informing man what he could eat was considered the final act of creation. This seems very odd. First of all, how is this a creative act, what is actually being created? Second of all, why is this the final, and seemingly the pinnacle, of Hashem's act of creating the world?

Rashi (*Bereishis* 2:5) explains that until man came and *davened* for rain, nothing actually sprouted from the earth. Essentially, Hashem made man an active partner in creation whereby man's food was based on man's



participation in the process. Thus, food has two critical elements to it: it provides nutrition to the body and, more importantly, provides satisfaction and validation. Meaning, man has been given the opportunity to feel that he is contributing to his own existence by his own work product.

This is why food has a remarkable element of social connectivity associated with it (think *kiddush* or going out to eat). Aside from nutrition, food has the elements of providing comfort and validation, which provides the ultimate mindset useful for connecting with others.

This ability to provide for one's own needs is why the Torah describes it as “*you will eat your bread to satiety*” (26:5). The Torah calls it “*your*” bread because the element of providing for your own needs is the ultimate sense of satisfaction. People often eat through their stress and pain, attempting to fill a void of personal self image caused by emotional upheaval.

The Torah is giving us the ultimate blessing that when we follow Hashem's Torah and *mitzvos* we will be validated through the food we eat as partners in Hashem's creation. Thus, even a small amount of food can satisfy us and make us feel good.

Here and There

If you walk in my statutes, and keep my commandments, and do them... (26:3)

Rashi (ad loc) is bothered why the *possuk* would first list “statutes” (*chukim* in Hebrew) and then use the catch-all phrase of “commandments” (*mitzvos* in Hebrew) in the second half of the *possuk*. After all, the Torah’s statutes are all included in the commandments of the Torah, why mention statutes at all? Rashi answers that the word *chukim* here refers to the concept of being immersed in Torah study. That is, each person has an obligation to become seriously involved with the study of Torah.

Targum Yonason Ben Uziel (ad loc) is seemingly bothered by the same question but he takes a different approach: “*chukim*” refers to those laws that are given without a discernible (or an accompanying) reason for doing them, the way a *chok* is commonly understood, whereas the word “*mitzvos*” refers here to *dinnim* (laws of social justice). But Targum Yonason’s understanding of the word “*mitzvos*” seems a bit problematic, after all the word “*mitzvos*” is all encompassing as there are many types of *mitzvos*; why should it be limited to the laws of social justice?

The Mishna in *Peah* (1:1) reads: “...These are things the fruits of which a man enjoys

in this world, while the principal remains for him in the World to Come: Honoring one’s father and mother, acts of kindness, and bringing peace between a man and his fellow. But the study of Torah is equal to them all.” Maimonides, in his commentary to this Mishnah, states a very interesting principal of how a person is rewarded for doing the *mitzvos*: “There are two types of *mitzvos*; 1) those *mitzvos* that are between an individual and Hashem such as *teffilin* and *tzitzis*, observance of Shabbos, and the prohibition against idol worship, and 2) those that are between an individual and his fellow man, such as the prohibition against stealing and otherwise hurting another, the obligation to love others, and honoring one’s parents.”

Maimonides continues: “Those *mitzvos* that are between man and Hashem are rewarded in the next world. *Mitzvos* that are between an individual and his fellow man are rewarded both in this world and in the next.” Maimonides is explaining a basic principal of reward; *mitzvos* as they relate to the development of the human soul, in general, are an eternal concept. Therefore, their proper reward is in the next (eternal) world. But there are also

mitzvos that have substantive benefits to others in this world. These *mitzvos* are also rewarded in the next world, but because they have positive effects in this world, the “interest” on the “principal” is paid to the individual in this world as well. This is what the Mishna means by the “fruit” is enjoyed in this world but the principal remains for the World to Come.

This week’s *parsha* is introducing all the benefits in this world of keeping the *mitzvos*. The reason Targum Yonason Ben Uziel translates *mitzvos* as the commandments related to social justice is because he agrees with Maimonides that those are the only *mitzvos* that are rewarded in this world as well as the next.

Fascinatingly, the Mishna equates the study of Torah to all the *mitzvos*. In other words, there are tangible benefits to this world through the study of Torah. Perhaps this is what the Gemara (*Brachos* 64a) means when it says “Torah scholars increase peace in the world.” The Gemara in *Brachos* ends with the statement explaining that those scholars are builders of the world and increase the peace within it. This might also explain why Rashi understands “*Bechukosai*” to mean immersion in Torah study.

Did You Know...

Parshas Bechukosai contains many important themes that were often repeated in the Jewish people’s history. It opens with the *bracha*, a very generally-termed promise of the good things that will happen if we do what we are supposed to do (studying Torah and keeping certain *mitzvos*, see first article). Then, it tells of the bone-chilling *tochacha*, the five stage admonition that tells us in very specific and certain terms what will happen to us if we fail to earn the *bracha*, each more severe than the

last. Then, we learn of Hashem’s promise to preserve us, even when we are at our lowest.

The Mishnah, in *Megillah* 31a, relates that we are to read the *tochacha* on fast days (not our custom) and that one may not divide the *tochacha* (according to Rashi referring to that of *Parshas Bechukosai*) into more than one *aliyah*. Interestingly, the *halacha* not to break up the *tochacha* only applies to the one in *Vayikra*, not to the *tochacha* in *Devarim*. This is also taught in *Shulchan Aruch* (*Orach Chaim* 428:6). The Gemara there gives two reasons for this rule. One is based on

Mishlei 3:11, “My son, don’t be disgusted with Hashem’s *mussar*.” Rashi explains that if we divide the *tochacha*, it will appear as if we stopped in the middle because the person receiving the first *aliyah* was disgusted with it.

The second reason is offered by Reish Lakish, who explains that one should not recite a *bracha* on punishments. Therefore, we begin the *aliyah* a few *posukim* before the *tochacha* and don’t stop reading until a few *posukim* after it is completed. If we would separate it, the second *aliyah* would invariably have to recite a *bracha* on punishments.



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