

**Wembley Synagogue**

בְּחֻקֹּתַי

Insights from the commentators into the Sidra of Bechukotai 5768

What's the Sidra about?

1st & 2nd Aliyot: The beginning Pesukim describe the wondrous successes awaiting the nation, so long as they follow G-d's Mitzvot. **3rd Aliya** This Aliya is called the Tochecha - the Rebuke. It is a lengthy description of the terrible punishments awaiting the nation, if they do not follow the Torah. It is customary for the Baal Koreh to have this Aliya, and to read it faster and more quietly than the rest of the Parsha. **4th Aliya:** The established prices for endowments of an individual's worth, or that of an animal, are listed. **5th, 6th & 7th Aliyot** The final portions deals with endowments of property to the Bet Hamikdash. (Source: Rav Aron Tendler)

אם־בְּחֻקֹּתַי תֵּלְכוּ - If with my laws you will go (26:3)

The Torah enumerates some of the blessings that one will receive if he fulfills "If with my laws you will go". Rashi interprets this phrase -"with my laws you will go" as the diligence and toil in the study of Torah. Notice that Rashi does not require a particular level of Torah scholarship in order to merit these blessings. Rather, Rashi indicates that simply expending the effort to study Torah is sufficient to earn a person the blessings-even if he does not succeed to actually understand the intricacies of Torah law.

The fact that one who studies Torah is rewarded just for expending effort is indicative of just how unique Torah study is. Most occupations provide rewards only when there are results. For example, nobody would pay a shoemaker who failed to fix a pair of shoes, no matter how much effort the shoemaker invested in the attempt. We pay for the product, the fixed shoes, and we ignore the amount of effort that the laborer expended. Torah study, on the other hand, is in itself a worthwhile activity, regardless of the student's actual progress. The activity of Torah study is intrinsically valuable and every effort is rewarded. (Source: Chafetz Chayim)

Berachot Ukelalot (referred to as the Tochecha) are found in Vayikra (Bechukotai) and Devarim (Ki Tavo). The Gemara (Megilla 31b) comments that one is permitted to pause in the middle of the Tochecha in Ki Tavo while one may not do so when reading the Tochecha in Bechukotai. The Gemara explains that the Tochecha in Bechukotai was given in the plural form and Moshe relayed them "Mpi Hagevurah", with a direct transmission from Hashem. The Tochecha in Ki Tavo was given in the singular form and Moshe stated them on his own, "Mpi Atzmo". Tosafot immediately comments that Mpi Atzmo means that they were given through Ruach Hakodesh.

The Rav asked why we distinguish between parts of the Torah to say that this part came from Pi Hagevurah while this part came from Pi Moshe? ALL of Torah is Mpi Hagevurah, divinely given by Hashem, so why distinguish within the Tochecha?

The Rav explained that in the Tochecha in Bechukotai, Moshe was given the Ukelalot as the representative, as well as a member, of Knesset Yisrael. Moshe's role was that of a messenger to transmit the message from Hashem to Bnei Yisrael. Hence the plural form is used to include all of Bnei Yisrael. In Ki Tavo, Hashem wanted that Moshe should speak to the people using his own name and warn them of the consequences of their actions if they do not follow the Torah of Hashem. However, in both Bechukotai and Ki Tavo, the Berachot Ukelalot were determined and ordained by Hashem.

In Bechukotai, Hashem speaks directly to Bnei Yisrael, for example and I will provide rain in its proper time. Moshe is included as a recipient of this favour from Hashem, just like all other members of Knesset Yisrael. Moshe's role was limited to his being the appointed messenger to relay the message to Bnei Yisrael. There are two parties involved in the covenant in Bechukotai: Hashem and Knesset Yisrael, and there is one messenger who is also a member of the second party: Moshe.

In the covenant of Ki Tavo, the role of Moshe changed. The nature of this covenant was with each individual member of Bnei Yisrael, for example it says "Vhayita Meshuga" (and you will become depraved) in singular form. Hashem wanted that Moshe should be the Mashbia, the one who administers the oath, to Bnei Yisrael. In this Tochecha, there are three parties involved in the covenant: Hashem, Moshe and Knesset Yisrael. (Source: Shiur HaRav Soloveichik ZT"L on Parshat Bechukotai date: 25/5/76)

Who is called to the Torah for the reading of the Tochacha?

In the past, deciding whom to call to the Torah for the reading of the tochachah was a serious point of contention. Many people, among them great scholars, felt that being called to the Torah for this portion was a bad omen that would result in tragedy and misfortune. **[There are a number of early sources who express this fear, see Magen Avraham 4 28:8 quoting Maharil; Kaf ha-Chayim 428:34 quoting Sefer Chasidim. See also Rama O.C. 53:19]** Over the years, the situation deteriorated to the extent that a congregant would have to be paid to accept the aliyah, and if no one would agree to be "hired", the Torah reading of the week [and of Parashat Ki Tavo] was omitted altogether **[Beur Halachah O.C. 428:6]**. In other communities, shul decorum was shattered while congregants fought and argued as to who, in their opinion, should be punished by being called up for this portion **[In one community the gabbai, a tailor, "punished" a competing tailor with this "honour". The gabbai did not live out the year (told by Harav Y. Kamenetsky)]**. In other communities, the gabbai publicly announced from the bimah that whoever wished to do so should volunteer for the aliyah **[Rama O.C. 428:6, according to the understanding of the Machatzit ha-Shekel. Divrei Yisrael 1:61 testifies that this was the prevailing custom in Hungary]**, while in other communities this part of the reading was read by the Torah reader without anybody being called up **[Sho'el u'Meishiv 5:9]** Most poskim were critical of and dissatisfied with all of these options **[Ha-elef Lecha Shelomo 63; Minchat Elazar 1:66; Igrot Moshe O.C. 2:35]** Consequently, it has become customary in many shuls for the Torah reader himself to be called upon to read the tochachah. **[Generally, when the reader himself receives an aliyah, there is no need to call him by his name, since he is standing at the bimah regardless; Rama 139:3 and Mishnah Berurah 8. For unexplained reasons, this is not the custom in many places]** Indeed, even if the reader is a Kohen, the aliyot must be rearranged so that the tochachah is included in the aliyah of the Kohen. Even when Bechukotai is read together with Behar, it should be arranged that the aliyah for the tochachah will be the last aliyah (acharon), so that the Torah reader who is a Kohen will be called for the aliyah of the tochachah. Although the general rule is that whenever two parashiyot are connected, it is proper to connect them at the fourth aliyah **[Mishnah Berurah 282:5]**, we do not follow the rule in this case **[Mishnah Berurah 428:17 and Beur Halachah.]** If, mistakenly, the gabbai called a person other than the reader to the aliyah of the tochachah, that person may not refuse the aliyah. Even if he knows that the gabbai had malicious intentions when calling him up, he still may not refuse the aliyah once he has been called up. If, however, he knows in advance that he will be called, he may walk out of the shul before being called up **[Mishnah Berurah 53:58; 428:17]** It is prohibited to "interrupt" during the reading of the tochachah, i.e., the portion cannot be broken into two or more segments to accommodate more aliyos **[O.C. 428:6]**. If, however, a mistake was found in the Sefer Torah during the reading of the tochachah, a new sefer should be brought out and the reading continued. In the opinion of several poskim, this is not considered to be an "interruption" because the same person who was called to the Torah remains there **[Kaf ha-Chayim 143:38; 428:32. There are dissenting opinions who hold that the reader should continue reading until the end of the tochachah; see Pischei Teshuvah 428:6 and She'arim Metzuyanim b'Halachah 78:3]** The custom is to read the tochachah in a lowered tone of voice **[Magen Avraham 428:8]** Care must be taken, however, not to read it too quietly, lest it not be heard by the congregation **[Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 78:4; Kaf ha-Chayim 428:38]** (Source: Halachot Relating to Parashat Bechukotai by Rabbi Doniel Neustadt)

שבת שלום!
Shabbat Shalom



Shabbat starts 8.00pm



Shabbat ends: 9.59pm

לע"נ ר' מרדכי צבי ב"ר חיהאל משה וולפסון ז"ל

The *Insights into the Sedra* sheet is edited by Chazan Anthony Wolfson

Online at: http://www.wembleysynagogue.org/html/sedra_notes.html

