

TOCHACHA

“The Great Scolding” Parashat Behar-Behukotai 5775

The “Tochacha” (Rebuke) is read twice a year: once during the forty-nine days of counting the Omer leading to Shavuot which commemorates the giving of the Torah, and again in the month of Elul before the High Holidays, calling us to repentance, to reconsider our paths.

Rabbi Yosi ben Chanina said: “A love without reproof is no love.” Resh Lakish said: “Reproof leads to peace; a peace where there has been no reproof is no peace.” Genesis Rabbah 54:3

From where do we know that if a man sees something unseemly in his neighbor, he is obliged to rebuke him? Because it is said: Thou shalt surely rebuke him. If he rebuked him and he did not accept it, from where do we know that he must rebuke him again? It says “Surely Rebuke,” meaning in all ways...

Rabbi Tarfon said: I wonder if there is anyone in this generation who accepts rebuke, for if one says to him (Tarfon) Remove the mote (small substance/piece of material) from between your eyes, he would answer: Remove the beam from between your eyes! Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah said: I wonder if there is one in this generation who knows how to reprove! Rabbi Yochanan said, I call heaven and earth as my witness that because of me Akiva was punished, because I used to complain about him before Rabban Gamliel, and all the more so Akiva showered me with love. This proves true the quote from Proverbs 9:8: Reprove not a scorner, lest he hate thee. Reprove a wise man, and he will love thee. *Talmud, Arakhin 16b:17-32*

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

In the past, deciding whom to call to the Torah for the reading of the tochecha 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.

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.

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 "honor". 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 (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. Most authorities were critical of and dissatisfied with all of these options.

Consequently, it has become customary in many shuls for the Torah reader himself to be called upon to read the tochecha. [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. 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 tochecha 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 tochecha will be the last aliyah (acharon), so that the Torah reader who is a Kohen will be called for the aliyah of the tochecha. Although the general rule is that whenever two parashiyot are connected, it is proper to connect them at the fourth aliyah], we do not follow the rule in this case. If, mistakenly, the gabbai called a person other than the reader to the aliyah of the tochecha, 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. It is prohibited to "interrupt" during the reading of the tochecha, i.e., the portion cannot be broken into two or more segments to accommodate more aliyot. If, however, a mistake was found in the Sefer Torah during the reading of the tochecha, a new scroll should be brought out and the reading continued. In the opinion of several authorities, this is not considered to be an "interruption" because the same person who was called to the Torah remains there. There are dissenting opinions who hold that the reader should continue reading until the end of the tochecha. The custom is to read the tochechah in a lowered tone of voice. http://www.wembleysynagogue.org/5768-33_Bechukotai.pdf

7th Grade Parsha

Parshiot Behar - Bechukotai- The Tochacha

<http://yhtparsha.blogspot.com/2013/05/parshiot-behar-bechukotai.html>

In Parshat Bechukotai, we find the Tochacha. The Torah lists the Brachot and the Klalot. The Brachot are written in more general terms, and take only a few pesukim to list. The Klalot, however, are written in very scary, specific detail, and take up a large amount of Pesukim in the Torah. Another interesting note is that the Brachot defined as reward for following the Torah and keeping the Mitzvot are all physical things- rain, good produce and successful crops, peace and prosperity.

Q: Why does the Torah only mention the physical rewards and neglect to mention the spiritual reward for keeping the Mitzvot? And why are the Brachot written so concisely, while the curses are so long and detailed?

1. **Rashel Rouhani** May 3, 2013 at 3:54 PM

The torah only mentions the physical rewards because we have to figure out by our self's what the rewards are. and the brachot are written so concisely because the brachot don't need a long explanation. HAVE A GOOD SHABBAT!!!!

-lira rouhani

2.

Jordy Gross May 3, 2013 at 4:05 PM

I'm not absolutley sure, but I think that the Torah doesn't mention any spiritual rewards, any rewards in the the World To Come, and is not very specific about rewards for good deeds/blessings, because we should want to do Mitzvot, ot because we have to or because there is a great reward in the end, but because we can and want to do Mitzvot. We are probably a very specific and scary discription of the punishmants of sinning, becausewe may end up underestimating the punishment and sin.

Have a great Shbbos!

-Jordy Gross

3.

Eliana Appel May 5, 2013 at 6:40 AM

the Torah neglects to mention the spiritual rewards, and only mentions the physical rewards because, we shouldn't need a spiritual reward to make us do the Mitzvot, we should do it because we want to. the Brachot are witten shortly and undeetailed, while the Klalot are long and very detailed, because Hashem wants us to see, how serious the Klalot are, to stop us from doing bad things.

4.

Dodie W. May 5, 2013 at 2:34 PM

The human mind is almost always positive. If Hashem wrote down simple curses we would make them out to be 'not so bad'. So when Hashem tells us in detail, all the bad things that will happen to us if we don't listen to the torah we cannot 'edit' or 'revise' the punishment in our heads because it is so clearly stated. When it comes to the brachot Hashem does us a favor, he lets us come up with all of the rewards we will receive if we do follow His mitzvot.

5.

Bailey Fink May 5, 2013 at 4:31 PM

Because we can't really understand spiritual reward so there is no point of talking about it but we can definitely understand physical punishment.

6.

Avigayil Wolff May 5, 2013 at 4:40 PM

The Torah doesn't mention the spiritual rewards and only the physical rewards because we are in the physical world and not the spiritual world. Not everyone is going to think about the spiritual punishments we can get while we are still in the physical world. The reason that the brachot are written without details and the Klalot are written in great detail is maybe because Hashem wants us to not do bad things so that we find out for ourselves what the Brachot are in full detail. I think that Hashem believes in us that we will succeed in receiving the brachot and that's why he didn't write them in full detail.

7.

Melanie Sokolow May 8, 2013 at 7:47 PM

I think that the Torah only mentions the physical rewards because human beings have a tendency to think only of the reward, as in if one asks another for something, they will reply what will you give me? We don't have the capacity to imagine the reward in the world to come, and so we would say what will we get NOW. I think that it goes into detail of the punishment so that we won't be able to say oh you never told me that (also a tendency of the human race) and it is outlined clearly exactly what will happen if we do sins.

8.

Yael Kirshcner May 11, 2013 at 9:16 PM

the torah says the physical reward and not spiritual because i think we have to always believe in hashem. we have to constantly believe he's real when we can't see him so we have to especially trust the torah that we will gets spiritual reward even if it doesn't talk about it

9.

Kayla Manouel May 12, 2013 at 6:54 PM

the torah wants to show you that its not all about the reward you get for it and even if you dont get a physical reward hashem always knows what you ahve done and gives you a spiritual reward

10.

Tammy Krikheli May 23, 2013 at 3:27 PM

The torah neglects speaking about physical rewards because we shouldnt be motivated to do things only spiritually, we should want to do things whole-heartedly and physically as well.

11.

Talia Montalto May 24, 2013 at 2:54 PM

the torah doesnt talk about the spiritual reward because we need to do mitzvot because we want to not because were going to get a reward. the klalot are long and detailed because hashem wants us to know how serious they are and doesnt want us to do bad things.

12.

Hannah Shulman June 4, 2013 at 3:53 PM

The torah neglects to talk about the spiritual rewards because it is hard for a person to really understand olam haba. It doesn't give us as much of a drive to do the mitzvah. Instead we here the physical reward and then we will also get a reward in olam haba. I think that maybe the klalot are mentioned in more detail because we need to realize our actions. Sometimes something so small is not relivant to us, but hereing the klalot for something that seems so irrelevant can teach us to watch our actions.

13.

clara nabavian June 9, 2013 at 5:13 AM

the torah neglects to talk about spiritual rewards because its hard to understand olam haba and we dont really need a spiritual reward, we should be doing mitzvot because we want to; the tochacha goes into description for curses but the brachot concisely, because people usually underestimate what a sin could do, so the tochacha shows us that we shouldnt sin unless we want something really bad to happen to us

14.

Leeor Perl June 11, 2013 at 1:48 PM

the torah only mentions physical rewards and neglects spiritual rewards because its hard to understand olam haba, and we should not only be doing the mitzvah just for the reward e should do it because we feel its the right thing to do and because Hashem commanded us to.

Sefer - Vayikra

"Our treatment of [these] passages will assume that we have much to learn from the Torah, even though we do not accept its authority blindly and without question" (Bamberger in Plaut *Revised Edition*, 643).

Parashah - B'chukotai

Leviticus concludes with a choice between blessing and curse: if we choose to follow God's moral and religious law we will be blessed with prosperity and peace, and if we do not we will be met with personal and collective tragedy. The final verses return to cases in which a person or property has been consecrated to God, extreme examples of the kind of sacred separateness that has been a central concern for the book of Leviticus.

Aliyah - First aliyah: Leviticus 26:3-5

Whether we experience a life of blessing is up to us.

If you follow My laws and faithfully observe My commandments, I will grant your rains in their season, so that the earth shall yield its produce and the trees of the field their fruit. Your threshing shall overtake the vintage, and your vintage shall overtake the sowing; you shall eat your fill of bread and dwell securely in your land .

Comment

How do we achieve lives full of blessing? *Parashat B'chukotai* suggests that God bestows our fortune in direct relationship with the tone of our actions. God's blessings are conditional, dependent on our loyalty expressed by our behaving in accord with mitzvot. This is the fundamental expression of *brit*, a covenantal relationship between God and the Jewish people.

If you follow My laws and faithfully observe My commandments, [then] ... The blessing of bountiful food is followed by the blessing of a peaceful existence. This theme recurs through Torah, reaching its climax in Deuteronomy. The blessing from Deuteronomy 11:13-21 comprises the second paragraph of the *Sh'ma*. Our predecessors in the Reform Movement deleted this paragraph from our *siddur*. Guided by scientific and rational thought, they were uncomfortable with a liturgy that stated we were bound by mitzvot and that God's behavior and ours were directly and inextricably tied to one another. That is not our experience nor is it how we choose to express our identity as Jews.

There are contemporary midrashim that interpret the connection between our actions and God's reactions less literally; "When will the people be able to live securely? When there is enough food for everyone, so that no one is driven to crime or violence for lack of food. Ultimately, then, the question of whether our society will be blessed with peace or cursed with violence depends on how we share our resources" (*Etz Hayim*, 747-748). Another interpretation is that the blessings and curses of *B'chukotai* are spoken in the third person plural, perhaps indicating that

the responsibility for right conduct and Jewish life are collective, as are the consequences;"When most members of a community follow God's ways, the community as a whole will prosper even if some innocent individuals suffer illness or injustice" (*Etz Hayim*, 747).

We are neither omnipotent nor impotent in trying to influence the course of events in the world at large or in our own smaller worlds. Illness and accidents, the actions of other people, may be out of our control. Nevertheless, we have changed the course of history in the past and we can do it again by believing and acting as though our individual decisions have cosmic significance.

When tragedy strikes, it is how we respond that defines us. Even in the face of enormous personal tragedy we have the power to recognize the godliness all around us. The Talmud instructs us to say one hundred blessings every day. This implies both that there are at least 100 moments in an average day when we could look for God's imprint on the world and also that we find it difficult to recognize these blessings. If we personally accept responsibility for striving to recognize goodness and walking in God's ways, then collectively we have the capacity for greater well being.

Verses 11-12 hold the key to understanding God's blessing: *I will establish My abode in your midst, and I will not spurn you. I will be ever present in your midst.* We can and should look and listen for God's presence in our personal and professional lives. Rather than attribute all our success to our own abilities and our personal and collective failures to God, we should be open, if not committed to the possibility that God is with us always, blessing us and challenging us to make our lives worthy, if not holy. In this season when we count the days between Passover and Shavuot, we would do well to count our blessings and make time to celebrate them.

Table talk

1. When something bad happens, is your first instinct to blame someone (yourself, someone else, God) rather than be upset with the unfortunate situation?
2. Rewards and punishments can help people learn how to do the right thing. What do you think is the best way to learn how to do the right thing for the right reasons-because it is the right thing to do rather than because you might get a reward or avoid a punishment?
3. Explain a situation in which your perception actually changed the way you understood the circumstance and its consequences. When has your perspective been a blessing and when a curse?

For further learning

In the curse section of *B'chukotai* there is a word that is found nowhere else in the Hebrew bible, and so we are forced to deduce its meaning from context. The JPS translation for *keri* in verses 21, 23, 24, 27, 28, 40, and 41 is "hostile". Rashi and Ibn Ezra consider *keri* to be related to *mikreh*, "chance", in the sense that the people follow God's ways only when convenient instead of out of obligation or love. Rabbi Salanter relates the word *keri* to *kor*, "cold", in the sense that the people follow God's commands in a calculating manner for benefit, causing God to act coldly without the love that makes forgiveness possible. Sifra notes a connection to *karah*, "happen", saying that if the people regard God's punishments as merely accidental happenings then God will treat them as of no more than incidental value. Reread the curse section substituting one or more of these alternate translations. How does it change or enhance your understanding of the section?

Torah Sparks (Conservative) Parashat Behukotai Prepared by Rabbi Adam Rosenbaum

Theme: Don't Tread on Me

But if you do not obey Me and do not observe all these commandments, if you reject My laws and spurn My rules, so that you do not observe all My commandments and you break My covenant, I in turn will do this to you: I will wreak misery upon you ... (*Leviticus 26:14-16a*)

The list of punishments for the Israelites who do not follow Torah appears to far exceed the list of rewards to a faithful Israel.

[Regarding] "If you do not obey Me ..." Why does it stress the word "Me?" This means that he is one who recognizes his Creator, but yet chooses to defy Him. — *Sifra*

[It happened] during the days of the youth of Rabbi Menachem Nachum of Chernobyl, when he was near the Baal Shem Tov. On the Shabbat when we read the Tochacha, the great scolding, which euphemistically in language filled with light, or blind, referred to as the Sabbath of blessing, he was called up to the Torah. At first he felt bad because they had assigned to him of all portions, this one! Behold, the Baal Shem Tov himself was reading the Torah, and when he began the reading of the portion, Rabbi Menachem Nachum felt he was a person who knew the sick and the burden of different pains, because with the reading of each verse from the great scolding, the pain of another limb was sent away and departed. So it went from one limb to another, until by the completion of the reading of the portion, his entire body was healed. — *Mignazay Tzadikim*

Those who work to cast off the yoke of the Law and the commandments begin by rejecting the "statutes" of the Torah on the grounds that they have no logical reason or purpose. Man, they claim, cannot be forced to do things for which he can find no good reason. But this is only an excuse, for from the "statutes" he proceeds to reject also those commandments for which there are logical reasons. For their aim is nothing less than to break the yoke of the Torah. The Lord says to the Children of Israel: "And if you will reject My laws": You will begin by rejecting My laws, the laws for which you can find no obvious reason. Next, "spurn My rules": You will not want to observe even those commandments which have logical reasons, because it is your intention is to "not observe all My commandments and you break My covenant." — *HaDrash VeHaEyun*

Questions for Discussion:

Sifra forwards the idea that God considers flouting the Torah's laws as a personal affront, that it is far worse to acknowledge God's existence and to ignore the Torah than to never acknowledge God in the first place. Does this reasoning partially exonerate one who is not knowledgeable, i.e. the child who does

not know to ask in the Passover Seder? Or does Sifra find it unfathomable that a Jew would not recognize God and the Torah in the first place?

Our story from Mignazay Tzadikim tells of someone who is healed when standing close to the Torah when God's rebuke is read to the congregation. What is the moral of this story? Is it that one who is strong enough to directly face the possibility of failure and punishment also becomes strong enough to combat it, thus symbolized by his body's healing? Or is it that the Baal Shem Tov's very presence is enough to heal Rabbi Menachem Nachum, since he knows that he will not have to face a potentially difficult future alone?

Unlike some people who find it easier to observe Jewish laws that appear logical, HaDrash VeHaEyun argues that it is most essential to follow the laws that do not seem to have a particular reason. Does following laws that may be more "mysterious" show a stronger faith in God? Or is it our responsibility to continually struggle with rules that don't have obvious logic so that we may one day discover reasons of our own to follow them?

Parshat Behar-Bechukotai: A Casual Curse

Excerpted from Rabbi Shmuel Goldin's 'Unlocking The Torah Text: An In-Depth Journey Into The Weekly Parsha- Vayikra' (Orthodox)

As Parshat Bechukotai and the book of Vayikra draw to a close, God delivers a stinging rebuke and warning to the Israelites. Known as the *Tochacha Haketana*, the small rebuke (in contrast to a second, larger rebuke found in the book of Devarim), this section contains a series of frighteningly prophetic descriptions of the tragedies that will befall the nation should they fail to follow God's ways.

At the core of this *tochacha*, a word is found that, in this conjugation, appears nowhere else in the Torah text. Here, however, this term, *keri*, is repeated no less than seven times within the span of twenty sentences. According to most authorities (see below), this term apparently connotes "casualness" or "happenstance" and is derived from the root *kara*, to happen.

The passages of the *Tochacha* within which the term *keri* appears are:

1. "And if you will walk with me *keri*..."
2. "And if in spite of these things you will not be chastised towards me, and you will walk with me *keri*..."
3. "And then I [God], too, will walk with you with *keri*..."
4. "And if with all this you will not hearken unto Me, and you will walk with Me with *keri*..."
5. "And I will walk with you with a fury of *keri*..."
6. "And they will confess their sin and the sin of their fathers, for the treachery with which they have betrayed Me, and also for having walked with Me with *keri*."
7. "And I, too, shall walk with them with *keri*..."



Questions

By using the term *keri* so prominently at both ends of the *Tochacha*'s equation, in both the description of the nation's possible transgression and in the description of God's possible response, the Torah apparently emphasizes a critical idea, central to the very nature of sin and punishment. *If we could only understand this concept*, the text seems to say, *we could finally recognize where we go wrong. We could strike to the core of our failures and their consequences, finding a way to break the recurring, tragic cycle that plagues our relationship with the Divine.*

And yet, the text remains frustratingly unclear.

Why, at this point, does the Torah suddenly introduce, for the first and only time, the word *keri*?

Once introduced, why is this term repeated so often in such a short span of text?

Above all, within the context of the *Tochacha*, in the realm of both sin and punishment, what does the word *keri* actually mean?

Approaches

A

Confronted with this puzzling term and its use in the *Tochacha*, numerous commentaries propose a wide variety of interpretations.

Both Rashi and his grandson, the Rashbam, for example, introduce a basic translation upon which most commentaries build. These scholars translate the word *keri* to mean "casual" or "inconsistent" (derived, as stated above, from the root *kara*, to happen). If the nation sins by worshiping God in an erratic, inconsistent manner, Rashi and the Rashbam explain, God will respond in kind and will relate to the nation haphazardly and unpredictably, as well.

A number of other commentaries, including Rabbeinu Bachya and the Ohr Hachaim, choose a related but different path. The term *keri*, these scholars maintain, describes a flawed world outlook that can lead to immeasurable sin. An individual who sees the world in a fashion of *keri* perceives no pattern to the events unfolding around him. In place of Divine Providence, this individual observes only random coincidence; and in place of punishment for sin, accidental misfortune. For such an individual, *tshuva* (return to the proper path) becomes increasingly unattainable. In a haphazard world governed by arbitrary forces, after all, there exists little incentive for change.

Going a step further, the Ohr Hachaim perceives in God's reaction – "And then I [God], too, will walk with you with *keri*..." – a carefully calibrated "measure for measure" response to the nation's failing. If the people refuse to see a divinely ordained pattern in the world around them, God will withdraw, making it even more difficult for them to perceive His presence. The punishments to follow will seem even more random, bearing no obvious connection to the nation's sins. The people's failure to recognize God's imminence will thus prove frighteningly prophetic, for God will respond with "distance."

For his part, Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch interprets the sin associated with the word *keri* as "indifference" to God's will. Those guilty of this transgression find considerations other than God's will central to their lives and their sporadic obedience to Torah law is thus purely coincidental. God responds to this sin in kind, says Hirsch, by removing His Divine protection from the nation and allowing the natural course of world history to determine their fate. The welfare of the Jewish people will be advanced only coincidentally, when that welfare happens to correspond to the interests and needs of the powerful nations around them.

Finally a group of other scholars, Onkelos chiefly among them, diverge from the above explanations entirely and explain the term *keri* to mean “stubbornness” or “harshness.” If the nation stubbornly refuses to obey based upon God’s law, God’s response will be harsh and unforgiving.

B

A clearer understanding of the puzzling term *keri* and its repeated use in the *Tochacha* can be gained if we consider the basic approach of Rashi and the Rashbam (who interpret the term to mean a casual approach to God’s will) in light of the “rules” that govern our own life experiences.

Many years ago, I asked the participants in one of my synagogue classes to name the one most important component in any successful interpersonal relationship. Expecting a plethora of suggestions, I was surprised when they unanimously responded with the one word which I had earlier defined for myself as my own answer: *trust*.

Our associations with each other, from partnerships to friendships to marriages, can endure many blows and setbacks. One wound, however, invariably proves fatal: *the total loss of trust*. When mutual trust is gone and cannot be regained; when the relationship no longer feels safe and secure; when each participant no longer believes that the other consistently has his partner’s best interests at heart, the relationship is doomed.

God thus turns to the Israelites and proclaims: “And if you will walk with me *keri*...”

If I find that you are deliberately inconsistent in your commitment to Me; if I find that you are only at My door when you choose to be; if I find that I cannot trust you to seek My presence and relate to Me continually; then I will respond in kind...

“And then I [God], too, will walk with you with *keri*”

You will no longer be able to count on My continuing presence in your lives. I will distance Myself and not be there when you expect Me to be. Our relationship will become casual and inconsistent; all trust will be lost...

God will forgive many failings and sins, but when we lose His trust, the punishments of the *Tochacha* are the result.

Points to Ponder

The text’s prominent use of the puzzling word *keri* in the *Tochacha* brings our study of Vayikra full circle... This complex central book of the Torah, with its disparate laws ranging from minute, mysterious rituals to towering ethical edicts, makes one real demand upon the reader.

We are challenged to earn God’s trust.

Judaism is not a smorgasbord. The Torah emphasizes that we cannot pick and choose the elements of observance that suit our fancy. Each law, from a seemingly minor sacrificial detail to a powerful edict such as “Love your fellow as yourself,” has its place and its purpose. Each halachic element is an essential component in the tapestry of trust meant to be woven between God and his people.

In structure and content, the book of Vayikra reminds us that when we earn God’s trust through faithful adherence to His multifaceted law, we will be able to trust in God’s continued presence within our lives.