SHABBAT WORKS

27 Iyyar 5782
Friday night, May 27 - Saturday, May 28, 2022
Omer 42: Malchut-Yesod

Candle Lighting: 7:39 pm
Havdalah: 8:41 pm

Parashat Bechukotai
Leviticus 26:3 - 27:34
Haftarah
Jeremiah 16:19 - 17:14

Shabbat Shalom!

Happy Birthday...
Stephen Hirsch
Ilbert Phillips
Loni Sosthand
Carol Zulman
Nancy Sushman
Billy McGuire
Edythe Chortkoff

This Week We Remember...
Joel Markus,
brother of Babette Markus, on May 29.

Harry Temple,
father of Mark Temple, on May 30.

Rachel Levy,
mother of Ralph Levy, on May 31.

Mazal Tov...
Judith and Richard Abuza on the wedding of their son, Dave, to Ali on May 21.

Mazal Tov to Willie Aron, the proud father, on Elijah and Isabella becoming B’nei Mitzvot!

Elijah & Isabella Aron
A WORD FROM
THE B’NEI MITZVOT

This is Elijah and Isabella Aron (also known as Eli and Izzy). We are 13 year-old twins, and we are really excited to be celebrating our Bar and Bat Mitzvah this weekend. We’d like to tell you a little bit about ourselves:

This is Eli. I’m getting ready to graduate from middle school and enter into high school in the fall. I’m interested in playing the piano, cooking, and playing video games. Looking forward to celebrating with my Ohr HaTorah family and friends!

This is Izzy. Like Eli, I too am going to graduate from middle school and go into high school this fall. I love music, and I’m playing both the drums and clarinet. This summer, I’m going to be playing clarinet at the world famous Carnegie Hall in New York with a middle school orchestra. I’m super excited to be celebrating my Bat Mitzvah!
This Torah portion begins with an “if-then.” If you live by the statutes of God you will be blessed. If you don’t, you will be cursed.

This “if-then” promise, the heart of what is called “Deuteronomic Theology,” is at the core of much biblical thought – a core that I sadly reject. If people walk in God’s law, there is no guarantee that they will enjoy blessings in this earthly realm. As often as not, the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer. This fact does not mean that I don’t believe in God’s existence – I just don’t believe in “if you hearken/then you will be blessed.”

The larger part of the “if-then” in our Torah portion is the list of the consequences if we don’t hearken to God’s statutes. “If you don’t hearken, these curses will follow.” The inevitability of the curses is as unreliable as the blessings. Disregarding God’s law does not bring on the horrific, almost obscene curses that are threatened in this Torah portion as consequences of not hearkening.

What does seem to be true is that this list of the brutal consequences of sin actually occurred. The destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem in 586 BCE led to a carnage and destruction that would not be imaginable without this Torah portion. If you have the mental strength to read through the curses in this portion, you will be struck by the power of the horror of the images, and struck twice when you realize all this happened, as it has happened in the recent past, and is happening now in the world.

The authors of the Bible took these gruesome memories and portrayed them as a warning; the past became future, a warning for future generations. The authors of this section of the Bible thought they had figured out history. Evil lurks and paces at the edges of reality, and when we sin, God unleashes the dogs from hell. These authors would tell us that we are ultimately in control. We can keep the dogs of hell at bay.

I appreciate that they were trying to understand history, to understand evil. Perhaps they believed in their answer. I never did believe in this biblical approach to evil in history, the “Deuteronomic Theology” (much to the dismay of some Orthodox friends and family). Whatever I know of God, it is not a God who unleashes the dogs of hell on an entire nation, obliterating the wicked and the good alike.

I am very troubled by this Torah portion, but I read it anyway. I don’t look away. I need to confront how our ancestors tried to understand history and God, good and evil, even if I reject their answer. I listen to many people with whom I disagree; why not the authors of the Bible, too?
Living by the Statutes, Continued

It is true – I feel I must engage with the Bible in a more serious manner than I might engage with someone with whom I disagree. With the Bible, I feel constrained to engage in some kind of Midrash, some interpretation, to redeem the text from irrelevance.

This I know to be true: In our souls, within our authentic selves, we know there are statutes (chukim), laws of justice (mishpatim), mitzvoth (our being addressed by God personally) and torot (Divine teachings). These Divine urgings to a moral life are experienced in the conscience, and are articulated in the Natural Law, as well as in the righteous laws of states and in the righteous teachings of religions.

These teachings are true and certain. When we judge the actions of others, when we judge what happens in history, we are judging according to the chukim, mishpatim, mitzvot and torot of the Divine.

When we are outraged by murder and cruelty, wanton violence, and the trampling on the well-being of others, that outrage is rooted in the knowledge of God we carry within. Put simply: if what we see were not evil, we would not be incensed.

The way of God, known within, tells us what is evil, and also tells us what is good, what is the right way to live. If every person in our city, our state, our nation, the world woke up one day and committed to living by conscience, each of us would transform and the world would transform. If someone does not know what these ordinances and statutes are and mean, then we create halls of study. And, in my ideal world, we all study every day and support our halls of study, not just for our sake, but for the sake of one who needs that hall of study – desperately, today. We should live lives of goodness – without anger, resentment, despair and hatred. We would learn to face down the urges toward destructiveness and violence. We would teach others, those who need to learn this the most.

These halls of study of the righteous path are not easy to find. A student can go all the way through a course of study in school and never encounter virtue, rationality and wisdom, and never be confronted by their own depth, their own shadow.

This wisdom is embedded in our language and hovers in the unconscious, yearning to be articulated. As a society, we turn away from the language of morals at our peril.

Does the destruction in our Torah portion come if we sin against God? I wouldn’t put it that way.

Is the destruction, small and great, more likely to come if we ignore the urgings of the Divine embedded in our souls? Most certainly.

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Shabbat Zoom Sessions

**Friday Evening, 7 pm**
Candle Lighting and Brief Teaching  
Meeting ID: 852 4540 4129  
Password: 290167

**Shabbat Morning, 10am**  
Shabbat Morning Teaching  
Meeting ID: 245 967 453  
Password: 595703
Today’s parsha is often called “the blessings and curses.” It is almost entirely composed of a short set of blessings that will befall us if we obey the laws of God, followed by curses of increasing severity if we do not follow the laws.

1. The blessings of observance: a land of plenty; a time of peace and security; God’s presence among us. Reminder: God broke the yoke of our slavery and will lead us upright to our land.

2. The curses if we do not hearken and find the decrees loathsome; if we utterly reject them and annul the covenant. Seven sets of curses.

3. A reminder that God will always remember the covenant of the ancestors and the land, and that God took us out of Egypt.


The prophetic portion for today matches the Torah portion in envisioning exile and subjugation for Israel because of idolatry. Those who worship idols and who put their ultimate trust in human beings will suffer greatly. The Haftarah, however, ends with a note of consolation. Those who pray to be healed will be healed, those who pray to be saved, will be saved.