

## Bechukotai 2022/5782

Our portion this week is Buchukotai. It is the last Parsha in the book of Viyekra—Leviticus. The Parsha makes very clear what it is to live as Jews—people of the Covenant. On the one hand, there is an idyllic picture of the blessing G-d can bestow on the Jewish community. If Israel follows God's decrees and keeps His commands, there will be rain, the earth will yield its fruit, there will be peace, the people will flourish, they will have children, and God will make them free.

On the other hand, the Parsha lays out curses—the terrible consequences if the Israelites fail to honor their mission as a holy nation. Reading these curses in the Parsha is scary and a reminder of our mission to be a light upon the nations.

The idea behind the blessings and curses is clear. It is an important message in Judaism and for life in general. Our actions will have consequences and we are responsible for those actions and their consequences. G-d's instructions to the People of Israel are intended collectively. After concluding the list of curses, G-d tells Moses:

**40**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.

**41**Then I too, will treat **them** as happenstance and bring them [back while] in the land of their enemies. If then, their clogged heart becomes humbled, then, [their sufferings] will gain appeasement for their iniquity,

Lev: 26:40,41.

But the lesson of this Parsha applies equally to individuals. We are all responsible for the consequences of our actions.

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Two events in recent days demonstrate what happens when people fail to take responsibility for their conduct and what can happen when we do.

In a tragedy in the Middle East, the part of the world known for tragedy, Shireen Abu Akleh, a Palestinian American reporter for Al Jazeera, was shot and killed on May 11, while she was covering a clash in Jenin. Who fired the shot that killed Akleh is unclear and may remain so as the Palestinians are not allowing a joint investigation to take place.

Assuming for argument's sake that Ms. Akleh was killed by an Israeli bullet, why was the IDF in Jenin last week? In the past two months, violence carried out by terrorists from Jenin has taken multiple Israeli lives during multiple terror attacks. The IDF was in Jenin in response to that terrorism directed mostly at Israeli civilians.

In this context, the death of Ms. Akley was the consequence of actions, not solely by whoever it was who shot the bullet that killed her, but the consequence of ongoing violent terrorism by Palestinians against Israelis. Of course this is nothing new. Just as it is not new that the Palestinians and too many other people in the world fail to recognize that there are horrible consequences from the ongoing incitement to violence and terror that the rulers of the Palestinian people continue to preach, and many others encourage.

For decades—going back even before 1948 and what the Palestinians call Nakba—catastrophe—the arabs of Palestine have refused to take responsibility for their rejection of Jews in the Jewish homeland and the establishment of Israel. Accepting some responsibility for the reality of their lives may be a more important first step to peace than some “peace process” imposed by outsiders.

On the brighter side, this past Thursday, the US Senate approved a \$40 billion aid package for Ukraine, following approval in the

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House of Representatives. Additionally, Sweden and Finland, two countries that have maintained non-aligned status for decades—centuries in the case of Sweden—have applied for NATO membership.

These actions are themselves the consequence of Russia's attack on Ukraine—consequences Vladimir Putin likely did not anticipate. But they demonstrate that people and countries not directly involved in the Ukraine war feel a responsibility to act, both for Ukraine and to maintain peace and the global order that has existed in Europe since the end of World War II. We shudder to consider the consequences if most of the world had failed to react to Russia's aggressions.

Following the list of curses, two verses from Bechukotai re-affirm G-d's covenant with the Jewish people, and bring us to the end of the book of Leviticus. G-d tells Moses:

**44** But despite all this, while they are in the land of their enemies, I will not despise them nor will I reject them to annihilate them, thereby breaking My covenant that is with them, for I am the Lord their God.

**45** I will remember for them the covenant [made with] the ancestors, whom I took out from the land of Egypt before the eyes of the nations, to be a God to them. I am the Lord.

Lev. 26:44,45.

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### SOURCES

Torah Reading for Bechukotai, <https://www.chabad.org/parshah/torahreading.asp?aid=2492761&jewish=Bechukotai-Torah-Reading.htm&p=complete>

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In the killing of a journalist, and the disruption of her funeral, Israel faces tough questions ([https://www.ijn.com/killing-journalist-disruption-funeral-israel-tough-questions/?mc\\_cid=776c9dc58f&mc\\_eid=dbde9191dd](https://www.ijn.com/killing-journalist-disruption-funeral-israel-tough-questions/?mc_cid=776c9dc58f&mc_eid=dbde9191dd))

Sacks, Jonathan. Leviticus: The Book of Holiness (Covenant & Conversation 3) (p. 360). The Toby Press. Kindle Edition.