

## Behar Bechukotai Drash 20<sup>th</sup> May 2017

Shabbat Shalom

A few months ago Stephen and I wanted to express our gratitude to all the people who make our Temple community wonderful and we thought that dedicating an Art of Psalms picture would be a nice way of doing that. It wasn't difficult to choose which picture we liked the most. As keen divers the one with the fish in it seemed perfect. The extract from the Psalm no. 8 reads "...The birds of heaven and the fishes of the sea...how excellent is thy name on all the earth." I even wanted to see the symbolism of the flying birds as my children taking off to make their own lives. That's when Stephen told me I was getting too carried away. So a date was set for this delightful and meaningful event. A few weeks later I volunteered to give the Drash and here I am.

This shabbat we'll read from two parshiot Parshat Behar covers laws about sabbatical years, jubilee years, taxation, land and slave ownership. Bechukotai is mostly a list of blessings and curses (some which are really horrible) that God says will happen to us if we don't follow the commandments. Right at the end of this chapter God assures us that the covenant between God and the Israelites will never be broken. Phew - !

The Haftorah this week is from the book of the prophet Jeremiah. I particularly liked the closing verses "Heal me, O God, and let me be healed; Save me, and let me be saved; For you are my glory." Still, as I thought of what could I say about all this nothing really grabbed me.

But I was in luck .These two Parshio come at the very close of the Book of Leviticus. For those of you not familiar with what that means I'll explain. Traditionally only at the very end of the reading of each Book of the Torah - we loudly say the phrase "Chazak chazak v'nitchazek". It is said not - as a blessing aimed at the individual reader of the Torah – but at the entire congregation, upon reaching a certain milestone and accomplishment - the completing of an entire book of Torah. It is a way to tell those present that they need to strengthen themselves through what they have learned, not to forget what they have learned, and to encourage them to continue learning. The exact translation is -"Be strong , be strong and let us summon our strength." Now this I found inspiring. You'll see that Rabbi Nicole will announce that all of you should stand up for that last aliyah and chant in unison - "Chazak chazak v'nitchazek".

It's much easier to be strong when life isn't throwing you some curve balls. When you're struggling to cope with a family crisis, or bad health, maybe ongoing financial woes etc. that's when you often feel forsaken. You feel abandoned and alone. You'll think how can I ask for help when so many others are also suffering? What's the point of asking for help when God doesn't even respond to my pleas. It all seems so futile. Now here's my message to you today. Whatever you're going through. It doesn't matter how embarrassing it is or how guilty you feel about it, remember that if you need emotional support you'll find it right here in our shule. We did and you can too.

Stephen and I come to shule every Saturday morning not just because we like seeing the same friendly faces week in and week out, or because the bagels at the Torah study session are warmed. It's because, we love the feeling of a 'bookend' to our busy week, we love the feeling of hanging around with fellow Jews for a couple of hours, we need to connect with God through prayers and rituals, we enjoy the Kiddushes and we also like the feeling that we're doing what our ancestors did for years and years before us. All that gives us strength. We could never have created this on our own. You've made us stronger and you've helped us summon our strengths. You are our community and we thank you from the bottom of our hearts.