

Emanuel Deutsch-Dornfeld's
D'var Torah
Bechukotai Leviticus 26:1=27:34

We already learned from Mickey's dvar Torah that this parsha is all about blessings and curses. The blessings and the curses that God talks about are a metaphor. God is trying to scare the people so that they create a well-rounded society, so people will live long and prosper and will follow God's rules and help each other. The lesson I think we are supposed to learn from this parsha is to follow the golden rule and treat others the way you want to be treated. If you are a good person you will receive blessings. If you are a mean person you lose your friends and other relationships. The blessings might not be rain and food, but an overabundance of friends. That is what the Torah is trying to teach us but the blessings and curses it uses as examples are on much larger scale.

In his commentary on Bechukotai Rabbi Avraham Fisher of the Orthodox Union writes, "If the people embrace Hashem's commands, the land will be blessed with prosperity, security, and peace (verses 3-13). Conversely, rejecting Hashem's edicts will result in the curses of

disease (verses 16-17), famine (verses 18-20), wild beasts (verses 21-22), war (verses 23-26), destruction and exile (verses 27-39). The purpose of these warnings is to stir the people to repentance. If the people do not heed the warnings, then the disasters become increasingly more dire. Unique to this chapter is the word *keri*, appearing a significant seven times--and nowhere else in Tanach (Scriptures)--at transition points in this passage: And if you walk with Me *keri*, and you will not desire to listen to Me, then I will add against you a plague, seven times your sins (26:21)." I believe this commentary in the sense that this commentary explains how *keri* is an important word in this section of the Torah. We found many definitions of the word *keri*, including being hostile or being cold toward someone. If the Israelites are cold to God, God will return the Israelites' coldness. If the Israelites are hostile to God, God will be hostile back and make all of these plagues that are mentioned actually happen. Further in the parsha, the verses say this explicitly - "if you remain in *keri* to me, I will act against you in wrathful *keri*."

Rabbi Marcia Plumb of the Union for Reform Judaism writes, "The first half of this week's Torah portion, B'hukotai, begins with 13 blessings (Leviticus 26:3-13), continues with 30 curses that will occur if we don't follow God's commandments (Leviticus 26:14-41), and ends with a final blessing of consolation from God (Leviticus 26:42-45). God basically says that even though there will be destruction, I will still be with you in the darkness." What I learn from this is that God sees the potential in the Israelites and will be there and stick by us in some way and may have compassion on us. People make mistakes, but they need to be able to have compassion on each other and forgive each other. If we weren't able to forgive each other, we would all go around hating each other, because everyone makes mistakes at some point. Even though this parsha seems unrelatable because it's about blessings and curses we can't imagine happening and it's about God acting in a way that doesn't make sense in our way of believe in God, it's actually really meaningful for our own modern lives. We can learn from the final blessing of consolation how important it is to have compassion and to be able to let go of grudges and bad feelings about people.

To me, Bechukotai is about how the Israelites need to be disciplined in their behavior. They need to learn that if you are a bad person, you will be treated badly and will live a short and unhappy life. I don't think that bad people necessarily live shorter lives and they may be perfectly happy in our modern world. But when they need other people most, those people might not be there. Living in the desert, it was really important to be kind to others, because they relied on each other so much for social support. On the other hand, according to the parsha, good people will receive rewards and live long, happy lives.

Question:

After hearing about the parsha, I would like you to think about these blessings and curses and how they relate to your everyday life but more specifically an example of each in your life and how they effected you and how you can learn and how you can learn from them. Also, what is your way of giving

respect to the earth, and what do you think God would do if
you did or did not respect the planet?