

**Michaela Deutsch-Dornfeld's**  
**Dvar Torah**  
**Bechukotai Leviticus 26:1=27:34**

In the parsha Bechukotai, we read that if we follow God's rules, we will be rewarded. But if we don't, we will have to face MANY consequences. There is also many statements in this parsha that we are treated by God in the way that we treat God, for example, "But if, despite this, you disobey Me and remain hostile to Me, I will act against you in wrathful hostility" (Leviticus 26:27-8). I believe we are supposed to learn that if you give respect, you will get more respect in return. This is true for the way we treat the earth as well, which the parsha makes clear by saying the earth will take back its sabbatical years if we do not follow them correctly. For instance, if we respect the earth, we will get rain, fertilized soil, and good crops in return. But if we disrespect the earth, we will get dead crops, no rain, and unclean air. This is important because we can learn that by giving respect and following nature's rules, we will hopefully only benefit from the good and not the bad. This is also the message of scientists who warn us about global climate change.

In the Torah, God says *“I will grant your rains in their season, so that the earth shall yield its produce and the trees of the field their fruit.”* Leviticus 26:4 The Torah also says if we do not obey God *“your land shall not yield its produce, nor shall the trees of the land yield their fruit.”* 26:20

Jonathan Neril is the project manager of the Jewish Environmental Parsha Initiative. In his commentary on Bechukotai he says, “This promise of abundant rains and prosperity is followed by a warning that, should Israel ignore the Torah, God will "make your skies like iron"-- cease all rains and bring drought, according to the Midrash. Conversely, the fact that we specifically ask that the rain be "for a blessing" acknowledges that too much rain is just as dangerous as not enough.” I agree with him because having rain is good, but too much or not enough rain isn't. One of the effects of global climate change is that we have more rain in some areas and less in others than we used to. For example, this past winter, we got a lot more snow than we're used to, and this affects the way crops grow during growing seasons. We ask the rain to

be a blessing because we can grow crops or plant trees. Rain could just as easily be a curse.

In last week's parsha, we were given the commandments about observing the sabbatical year, a year of rest for the land, in which we can't plant or harvest. The only way for it to work is to give the earth a sabbatical year each 7 years is if in the 6th year there is a more abundant crop than usual so that we can collect extra to feed ourselves in the 7th year. This requires having a lot of trust in the earth.

The commentator Rashi suggests that the reason for the sabbatical year is to give the land time to rest, just as the weekly sabbath allows a human being to seek renewal and revitalization through rest.” I agree with this commentary because just like humans, the earth needs its rest too. The earth always comes to meet our needs in our daily lives, but without the proper support, the earth will stop doing that.

Lawrence Bush and Jeffrey Dekro from SocialAction.com write in their commentary on Bechukotai, "Behukotai concludes the book of

Leviticus and details the blessings or curses that will befall the people as a consequence of following (or not following) "the commandments that the Lord gave Moses . . . on Mt. Sinai." A particularly strong link is established between the sabbatical year--the rest from economic activity--and the fate of the people. A disobedient people, Behukotai warns, will be scattered among its enemies and "then shall the land rest and make up `for its sabbath years." The Torah portion's portrait of devastation could serve as a modern environmentalist's worst nightmare."

By following God's rules and by respecting the Earth, we will be given respect in return, as well as many blessings. But by disrespecting the earth, we will have to face many consequences as humans trying to survive. The earth gives us our nutrients, and by disrespecting the earth by doing things such as continuously producing carbon dioxide and many other pollutants, the earth is being disrespected. But by planting various plants, using less energy, or by planting fruits or vegetables, we are respecting the earth, and that goes a long way.

## **Thank You-**

First, we would like to thank our rabbi, Rabbi Ariann for helping us and guiding us to create our divrei torah and mostly to challenge us to do more than we thought we were able.

We would also like to thank all of our friends and relatives who came today from near and far to help celebrate this significant life cycle event today.

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