

## A Shabbat Message of Torah from Rabbi Rheins

### And None Shall Make You Afraid

This week's Torah portion, *Bechukotai* (Leviticus 26:3-27:34), concludes the Book of Leviticus. While the text is often cited as an example of "reward and punishment," the messages in this intriguing reading go well beyond superficial pronouncements.

Yes, the first eleven verses list the blessings that await a generation who follow the Divine decrees. And yes, there quickly follow some 25 verses that detail the cursed consequences for those generations who abandon the ethical and moral ideal. But it is not as if our ancestors did not question and challenge the notion of reward and punishment. The entire Book of Job and much of Kohelet give voice to our ancestral struggle with the fact that good people often suffer and criminals sometimes prosper. Still, they noted that, in general, the consequences of our actions are a reflection of the choices we make. And though we note the exceptions, the expectations are that good behavior is rewarded and honored while evil ultimately leads to shame and comeuppance.

For that matter, though the number of verses for the "curses" outnumbers the verses for the "blessings" the conception of the blessings are dominant. Indeed, the understanding that blessings are very much in our grasp and can be realized through our actions is both enticing and frustrating. The reward is also a rebuke: "Since we can bring about this blessed ideal, why haven't we figured out a way to make the ideal real?"

One of the blessings is especially poignant:

וְנָתַתִּי שְׁלוֹם בְּאֶרֶץ וּשְׂכַבְתֶּם וְאֵין מִחֲרִיד  
***And I will grant peace in the land, and none shall make you afraid;***

As Rashi and other commentators have noted, without peace, none of the other "blessings," can be fully realized. On the other hand, in this topsy turvy twenty-first century, we can experience relative peace but still be afraid.

Though thousands of American troops are serving abroad and men and women who defend our country face danger every day, our nation is not at war. And that is a blessing.

Though the seven million Jews in the Land of Israel face the daily threat of Palestinian terrorism, missile and fire-bombing attacks from Hamas dominated Gaza and attacks from Hezbollah in Lebanon, they are not at war. And that is a blessing.

Even so, we are afraid. The threat of terrorism against America and Israel is felt every time we go to the airport and pass through the long lines of security. The threat of violence plagues us every time we learn of another incident at a school or movie theater or house of worship. The peace we yearn for is violated every day when we learn of yet another act of brutality, sexism, racism, homophobia, and anti-Semitism. The dread of

fear overtakes us every time we realize that this 21<sup>st</sup> century still provides ample evidence of our inhumanity and cruelty toward one another.

Our blessings are within our grasp. And still we are afraid. These are not curses from God. Rather, we have made our own choices. The world is ours for the making. And it is not enough to sit back and point at others and put the blame on government and political leaders. The blessings from God start with us, require us and will be realized by us. And if that is not sufficient motivation, then know that the world we bequeath is our gift (or curse) to our children and grandchildren.

Let us give them a *yerishah*, an inheritance of blessing!

Shabbat Shalom!

*Rick*

Rabbi Rick Rheins