



Behar/Bechukosai - Reversing the Flow of Time

Off by a week?

This week is a double Parsha so as to fulfill the Halacha recorded in the Gemara (Megilla 31b): “Ezra instituted for the Jewish people to read the curses in Vayikra before Shavuot and the curses in Devarim before Rosh Hashanah so that ‘the year should end with all its curses’ [and by contrast the New Year will begin with all its blessings]”. The Gemara goes on to explain that Shavuot is also considered a ‘new year’ because that’s when we are judged on the fruits of the tree. There are two difficulties: First of all, our custom is to actually read the ‘Tochacha’ in parshas Bechukosai two weeks before Shavuot! We are not fulfilling this law in the most literal sense, because there’s always the buffer of parshas Bamidbar. This way of doing things is ancient, the Rambam brings down our custom in the laws of Tefillah! Why don’t we fulfill the Halacha in its most literal sense and work out the ‘leining’ so as we read Bechukosai right before Shavuot? Why is it two weeks before? The other thing that needs to be understood is what this Halacha actually means. How does reading the Tochacha before Shavuot (and before Rosh Hashanah) accomplish that ‘the year will end with all its curses’?

Proof that blessings are good?

The first Midrash in Bechukosai brings the Pasuk from Tehillim (119:59) “I have calculated my path and I brought my legs back to your mitzvahs”. The Midrash offers several different interpretations to this and then starts relating it to our parsha where we have the curses. The Midrash explains that Dovid HaMelech was ‘calculating his path’ in the sense of taking a lesson from this week’s Parsha. He contrasted

how Hashem promises us peace and all the blessings if we keep the Torah, and all the curses that befall us if we don’t. In continuation of that discussion it says “Dovid HaMelech was saying: I calculated the blessings and I calculated the curses. The blessings begin with the letter ‘Aleph’ (as per the opening word of our Parsha “IM” -if [you walk with my statutes] which starting with the letter ‘Aleph’) and the blessings end off with “and I will lead you upright – “Komemiyus” which ends with the letter “Tav”. The blessings go from “Aleph” to “Tav” whereas the curses go from “Vav” to “Heh” as they begin (“V'im” - and if [you do not listen to me..] and end with “Heh” (as the pasuk says “in the hand of Moshe” the last letter of the name Moshe is a “Heh”) and not only that but they are reverse (as the correct order of the Hebrew Alphabet is to progress from “Heh” to “Vav”) this is to tell us that if you are worthy I will convert the curses into blessings when you keep my Torah...

This Midrash requires a great deal of explanation. One would think that the difference between blessings and curses is readily apparent: one is pleasurable and the other one is painful! Why would Dovid HaMelech need an indication from the pesukim to realize that blessings are more worthwhile? What’s even harder to understand is what he sees in the pesukim! He notices that the blessing start with “Aleph” and end with “Tav” and the curses start with “Vav” and end with “Heh”. What is the significance of that? What can that possibly be telling him? And lastly, what does it mean that since the curses go from “vav” to “Heh”, which is against the order of the Hebrew Alphabet, Therefore, if we are worthy, the curses turn to

blessings? What does all this have to do with the letters “Vav” and “Heh”?

What’s Real?

Dovid HaMelech cannot be asking such a simple question as to what is more pleasurable or more painful. That’s not something that needs any type of proof from the scriptures! He is bothered by a much bigger and deeper question: **are the blessings and curses equally as real?** Seemingly, in our world there’s the good and the bad. **Are they equally real?** This question is linked to a much greater question: Hashem who is good, and only desires good, called the whole Creation by the Genesis “good”. So where does the evil come from? The Rambam dealt with this question (Moreh Nevuchim section) and makes a very keen observation: reality on the whole is good, as Hashem himself declared at the time of creation. All the things that we call “bad” are very specific circumstances that happened to specific people at specific times and places. The person who is ‘complaining’ is only looking at himself and his particular situation at this particular point in time. But what is he and his particular circumstances at a particular time, relative to the whole of the universe and the whole of time? Even his particular suffering when viewed in the context of the whole may not be “bad” at all as it’s a part of a bigger picture which is “good”. It could be said that the “whole” is good and the “bad” is in detailed exceptions to the “whole”. Good and bad are not equally as real – as soon as the “whole” is revealed the “bad” no longer exists! That is what is alluded to when it says that Dovid HaMelech said: I saw that the blessings go from “Aleph” to “Tav”. “Aleph” to “Tav” represents not just the entirety of the Hebrew alphabet but the entirety of reality because the letters of the Hebrew alphabet make the words that created all of reality. Blessings from “Aleph” to “Tav” means to say blessings are the “whole”. Curses are between “Vav” and “heh” means that the bad is not in the “whole”, it’s just in the single space between two details.

“Heh”

Why “Vav” and “Heh”? What is meant by reverse flow from “Vav” to “Heh”? “Heh” represents physical matter. Chazal say that the Earthly realm was created with the letter “Heh” and that’s why it’s open at the bottom because in the Earthly realm is a hazardous place, easy to fall out, but one could always get back in through the opening on the side which represents Teshuva. The three legs of the letter “Heh” represent the three dimensions of the physical world, the way that it’s spread out, taking up a great deal of space represents matter that takes up space. The breaches represent the formlessness and disunity of matter.

“VaV”

The letter “Vav” is a line which is a connector. The literal meaning of “Vav” in Hebrew is ‘connector’. And that is the unique function of this letter in Hebrew: it connects like the English word “and”. It also converts past tense to future tense and visa versa – representing connecting time also. The “Vav” represents the **form** that holds the matter together in a constructive configuration. Matter was created in the first instant of the Genesis. It was shapeless and formless. In course of six days reality attained its form. The numerical value of “Vav” is six!

Torah shebichtav and Torah shebaal peh: Matter & Form

My Rebbe HaGaon HaRav Moshe Shapira ZTL applied this idea to explain the “Echod Mi Yodea” we say at the end of the Seder: “Who knows ‘five’ (numerical value of “Heh”)? I know ‘five’! ‘Five’ are the books of the Torah. Who knows ‘six’ (numerical value of “Vav”)? I know ‘six’! ‘Six’ are the orders of the Mishnah”. The written law and oral law have a **“matter – form relationship”**. The ‘material’ is provided by the written law. There are pesukim all across the ‘Chumash’ that need to be drawn together, compared, contrasted, and to resolve any arising contradictions. That’s what the six orders of the

Mishnah does! The oral law is what collates, compares and contrasts, and resolves. It gives unifying form to the material scattered across the written law. If you think about this you will realize that there's not one single Mitzvah that can be performed just on the basis of how it's written in the 'Chumash', even bris Milah. It never says where to cut! No mitzvah would have form to be manifest as a physical action if not for how the oral law gives structure to the information in the 'Chumash'.

"Heh" to "Vav"

When we look at the world around us we see that all beginnings start with unformed matter and then as they develop they take on form. That form gets further refined until they reach Peak perfection. A human embryo is 'just water' (in the words of the Gemara) during its first 40 days. On the 40th Day it gets a form. That form gets further refined until the time of birth. During childhood and adolescence the form of the body and mind continues to develop until the person reaches full physical and mental maturity. The same is true in any product. It first starts with the raw material be it Metal, wood, or clay, and then it is formed and shaped into whatever product we are trying to make. This pattern in life follows the pattern of the Genesis itself. At first the world was just matter without form and in course of the 6 ("Vav") days of creation Hashem formed everything out of the raw matter created at the first instant. That is what is represented by the "natural order" of going from "Heh" to "Vav" – matter progressing from an amorphous state to a refined form.

"Vav" to "Heh"

However after things reach their Peak perfection the process gets reversed and things lose their form and revert to just being formless matter. Whether it's the Aging of any living creature that as it ages the firmness and fitness of its body becomes '**unraveled**' until it is too unhealthy to live. When it dies it further **unravels** to total decomposition. The same is true with the

inanimate objects. When an object wears out, it didn't lose matter - **it's losing its form!** The law of conservation of matter is: "matter can be neither created nor destroyed". 'Decay' means that it's losing its **form** and dissolving. This is what the reverse flow of going from "Vav" back to "Heh" represents: **Regressing from a refined form back to formlessness**. This goes against the pattern of the Genesis itself! Where does the 'reverse flow' of regression come from? The sin of Adam. Just as he was punished with mortality, so also, as the the pasuk says: "**accursed** is the Earth because of you". The whole of reality was affected by his sin that is what brought "**curse**" into the world, which includes all types of decay and death.

'Decomposition' is artificial

This means is that decay and death are totally against the nature that Hashem created. Things are supposed to go from matter to being formed and that form to being further refined to Peak Perfection and beyond. The process of Decay and decomposition is something totally foreign brought into the world because of the sin of Adam. It is just as wrong as going from "Vav" back to "Heh". **Since it's so unnatural that's why if we Merit Hashem will convert all the curses into blessings!** "Curse" was never meant to be. It is as unnatural as reversing the flow of the "Alef-Beis". That's why if we would only live by the Torah all nature would go back to its natural course of "Heh" to "Vav" with matter attaining the refinement of form and never regressing.

New and Newer

What would have been if Adam would not have sinned? What will be in the future when there will be no more death, decay and decomposition? What would be the significance of **time** in that perfect world? In our corrupted world the passage of time brings death, decay, and decomposition. We dread growing old because time will rob us of our vitality and bring us to our end. But this is only true in our corrupted world. What is the function of time in

a world that doesn't know from death, decay, and decomposition? That perfect world is a world of perpetual newness! The "new time" would bring in new Divine lights, new Perfection of greater refinement to the form. New refinements you didn't have the day before. We will be "going from strength to strength". In that world **'today' everything is new and 'tomorrow' everything will be newer!**

Torah never gets old

What is like this in our world? The Torah! That's why we are commanded that it should feel "like new every day". Torah is from Hashem and is weaved out the "Aleph – Beis" in the proper order that Hashem wanted for the world. Everyday Torah renews. The new day brings in new Divine lights and new understandings you just could not have had in the same piece of Torah just the day before! The Torah is living on "Hashem's pace" and not by the pace of the world affected by the sin of Adam.

Reframing Time

Shavuos and Rosh Hashanah are both new beginnings. Rosh Hashanah ushers in a new year full of new energies and new opportunities. Shavuos is a new year because we recharge our connection to Hashem and his Torah. Torah itself is the ultimate source of newness. It is what Hashem used to create the world as "He looked into the Torah and created the world". It remains His word and His will. Just like Hashem never gets old so also his Torah is always fresh and new. That's why on Shavuos we are permitted to bring offerings from the **new grain** symbolizing that Shavuos enables us to feel **newness** in our Torah and in all our Divine service. **The 'spiritual' is impervious to the effects of the sin of Adam.** Before these renewals we need to correct our perception of the "flow of time". The notion that time depletes reality should be reframed as only being true as far as taking away the "bad" and moving it into oblivion. That's what it means: "let the year **wear out with all the curses**". Then we have to rise to a **new** perception: **time**

doesn't go - time comes and brings in new energies and new beginnings. We get that power from Reading from the "Tochacha" (curses in the Torah). When you connect the "bad things" with the Torah by reading what the Torah says about it – then the "bad" is subject to the power of the Torah. In the Torah's reality the concept of "passage of time" is to bring the bad into Oblivion. But as far as the good nothing is ever lost and every new day just adds something new without taking away what you had the day before. This transition doesn't happen just before Shavuos, it actually happens this week! During the days of the Omer (and likewise during the days of Elul), we are working on ourselves and **refining** our Middos and from Lag b'omer and onwards we already feel our connection to Shavuos and the Torah. At this point in the Omer we are so close that will already seeing time from The Torah perspective and these days between now and Shavuos or not days of robbing us of our Vitality - **these are days of bringing us more and more light and more Aura from the Torah that we are rapidly approaching. This is the secret that this final week of the Omer when historically the Jewish People reached the Sinai desert we are already commanded to see Torah Perpetually New** (see parsha sheet for Parshas Yisro)

Good Shabbos



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