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**Parshah Behar-Bechukosai
in a Nutshell**
(Leviticus 25:1-27:34)

Anshei Lubavitch Congregation

Rabbi Levi and Leah Neubort

Adult education:

Rabbi Avrohom and Rivky Bergstein

Youth Outreach:

Rabbi Eli and Ruty Steinhauser

Shul Temporarily Closed
"Shabbos Schedule"
Please daven at Home

Erev Shabbos – May 15 / Iyar 21

Candle Lighting 7:50 pm

Shabbos Day – May 16 / Iyar 22

Shabbos Ends..... 8:56 pm

**Latest morning Shema is now 9:13 AM. Be sure to recite the Shema before that time).*

Weekday Schedule (not on a holiday):

Shul Temporarily Closed
Please daven at home.

Incense Portion

Exodus 30:22–38

Although we unfortunately no longer have the Temple, the Kabbalists say that by reading the portion in the Torah that discusses the incense, it is as if one actually brought it. Thus, although many have the custom to recite this portion daily, one should take extra care to learn and recite it at the time of an epidemic.

On the mountain of Sinai, G-d communicates to Moses the laws of the Sabbatical year: every seventh year, all work on the land should cease, and its produce becomes free for the taking for all, man and beast.

Seven Sabbatical cycles are followed by a fiftieth year—the Jubilee year, on which work on the land ceases, all indentured servants are set free, and all ancestral estates in the Holy Land that have been sold revert to their original owners. Additional laws governing the sale of lands, and the prohibitions against fraud and usury, are also given.

G-d promises that if the people of Israel will keep His commandments, they will enjoy material prosperity and dwell secure in their homeland. But He also delivers a harsh "rebuke," warning of the exile, persecution and other evils that will befall them if they abandon their covenant with Him. Nevertheless, "Even when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not cast them away; nor will I ever abhor them, to destroy them and to break My covenant with them; for I am the L-rd their G-d."

The Parshah concludes with the rules on how to calculate the values of different types of pledges made to G-d. ❖

The Talmud teaches that the best vaccine against all illness is a healthy confidence in the Director of the Universe.

Upon recommendation of the Dept of Health, local hospitals, and the Rabbinical Council, the shul will be closed until further notice.

Charity

In late 1827 an epidemic broke out near the city of Lubavitch. The inhabitants turned to Rabbi Menachem Mendel, later known as the Tzemach Tzedek.

In addition to quoting a story in the Zohar about reading the portion of the ketoret during an epidemic, the Tzemach Tzedek suggested that, in light of the verse in Proverbs "And charity will save from death," they should add in charity. However, he stressed that, as is explained in Tanya, it is preferable to give charity many times throughout the day (especially before prayer) in smaller denominations than just giving one large sum, even if it equals the same amount. Ideally, the total sum of each day should be a multiple of 18.

Eruv website:

www.fairlawneruv.com

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Halachic Zmanim

Shabbos, May 16
Daylight Savings Time

Earliest Tallis 4:31 AM
Latest Morning Shema 9:13 AM
Earliest Mincha (Gedola).. 1:30 PM
Plag Hamincha 6:42 PM
Earliest Evening Shema 8:41 PM

Chassidic Masters

“The Evolution of Evil”

By Yaakov Brawer

*“All affairs of this world are severe and evil, and wicked men prevail.. “
(Tanya, part 1, ch. 6)*

No one who is even minimally acquainted with world history, and marginally aware of current events, is likely to take issue with this assertion by the chassidic master Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi. Its stark accuracy underlies one of the most disturbing questions in the annals of religious thought. Why should, and how could, the world be this way? The cruelty, violence and pain that permeate earthly life present no difficulty at all for atheists, nihilists or pagans. Anyone else, however, must square such a world with a loving, merciful, just, all-wise Creator.

This most distressing and demanding challenge to religious faith is constantly nurtured by a seemingly endless progression of individual suffering and horrendous historical upheavals. It is the subject of an entire book of scripture, Job; more recently, it has been assigned its own special title, “theodicy,” reflecting its pivotal status in modern religious philosophy.

For most of us, however, this classic quandary usually assumes a somewhat more prosaic form. Why do bad things happen to good people? Where was G-d during the Crusades, the Holocaust, the Hebron pogrom, etc.? How could

G-d allow the Black Plague to happen? How can G-d tolerate, much less sustain, the likes of Hitler or Stalin?

There are no answers to these questions, and misguided attempts at explaining them away invariably result in embarrassed retreats, waffling, and covering oneself with obvious platitudes regarding G-d’s inscrutability. The subject is simply beyond us, and the questions are best left alone.

Chassidic teaching, however, does not leave them alone. Since the Torah is the foundation of all of existence, its inner facet, Chassidism, has the power to reveal G-dly purpose and grace within life’s harshest realities. There are indeed no ultimate “answers.” Chassidism, however, does not offer answers, but rather insights that recast the questions in a broader, more sophisticated context, and that reveal layers of meaning in life’s long chain of seemingly random insults.

Brilliant Darkness

The question of earthly afflictions encompasses two dimensions: 1) the source and root of suffering, and 2) the form that suffering actually assumes in mundane life.

We can acquire insight into the first of these by examining the first blessing that introduces the morning recital of the Shema. The prayer blesses G-d “who forms light and creates darkness, who makes peace and creates all things.” The Hebrew word used here for “forms” is yotzer, and that

for “creates” is borei. These two verbs allude to two specific stages, or spiritual worlds, in the chain of cause-and-effect that extends downward from the essence of divinity to culminate in the physical universe in which we live.

The verb borei refers to the world of Beriah (“creation”), whereas yotzer denotes the world of Yetzirah (“formation”). The world of Beriah is “higher” than that of Yetzirah, which is to say that it precedes Yetzirah in the sequential process of divine emanation, and is thus closer to the divine source, the or ein sof or “infinite light.” Furthermore, in the descent from Beriah to Yetzirah, the divine creative force or “light” is condensed, restricted and obscured, such that the light, or “soul,” of Yetzirah is only a dim reflection of that of Beriah.

Beriah is thus a lofty world of dazzling illumination, compared to which lowly Yetzirah is relatively nondescript. Why then, in the above blessing, is Yetzirah characterized by light, whereas Beriah is associated with darkness?

The question is best addressed through an analogy. Newly minted academics often fall into a classic trap when they first begin to teach. They are determined to deliver lectures of such brilliance, profundity and eloquence that they will merit the adulation of their students, the admiration and recognition of their department chair, and the humble awe of their older colleagues.

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The outcome, of course is inevitably something else. They are indeed so brilliant, profound and eloquent that nobody can understand them, and they end up talking to themselves. The lectures are too deep and too densely packed with difficult material and advanced concepts. In short, the light is too abundant and too intense. Had the lecturer spoken in Swahili or remained silent altogether, it would have been all the same to the students, since they grasped nothing in any case. Thus, although there has truly been a great revelation of light, from the students' viewpoint there is nothing but darkness.

Similarly, the light of Beriah is so intense that it exceeds the capacities (the "vessels" in Kabbalistic-Chassidic terminology) of the lower realms to receive it, and it is therefore perceived as an absence of light—which is to say, darkness. In the transition from Beriah to Yetzirah, however, the light is reduced and veiled to the extent that it can be captured by the diminutive vessels of Yetzirah and thus recognized and appreciated as illumination.

The inference to be drawn from this is that life's events that are rooted in the highest levels of divine beneficence necessarily transcend the capabilities of the created intellect, and are thus, most often, interpreted as an absence of good. Revealed good of a far lesser order, however, is enthusiastically embraced and mistakenly valued as the ultimate expression of divine kindness.

Light and Vessels

Consider a parent who slaps the wrist of an eight-month-old child about to insert his finger in an electric socket. The slap is a form of communication. The parent wishes to convey to the child information essential to its very life, namely that the socket is charged with electricity of sufficient voltage to kill him should he succeed in inserting his finger. The problem is that this information or "light" infinitely transcends the intellectual capacities of the child. Eight-month-old children are incapable of relating to such advanced concepts as electricity, voltage or death.

In the case of an adult, the conceptual "light"—i.e., the information that a potential deadly electric shock awaits anyone who sticks his finger in a socket—is grasped, internalized and appreciated by the intellect. This assimilation of the light within the intellectual "vessels" of the mind elicits an appropriate emotional response, alarm, which in turn evokes a determination to act. The end result is that the finger is withdrawn from the source of danger, and it is to this end that the entire process was initiated.

The mind of the child, however, can not absorb the "light," so that the communication necessary to remove him from harm must bypass his insufficient intellectual and emotional faculties and simply activate a withdrawal from the socket. Although, in this regard, the slap is most effective, the "skipped steps" result in an unbridgeable gap between the slap and the light that motivated it. Hence, despite the fact that the slap is literally a gift of life that originates in the highest level of parental love, the child experiences only the absence of light and interprets the slap as random, meaningless suffering.

These and similar analogies help us to appreciate that the afflictions which we necessarily experience as evil and harsh are, in fact, rooted in the most sublime level of divine wisdom and love.

However, while this line of inquiry sheds some light on the origin of earthly anguish, it does not address the enormous disparity between the lofty G-dly source of suffering and the dreadful, appalling forms that it assumes in this world. In the analogy above, for example, it is the parent him- or herself who administers the slap to the child. Despite the inexplicable suffering, the child knows intuitively that the slap, delivered by his loving parent, does not express alienation or hostility; indeed, the parent comforts the child and wipes away the tears. In our case, however, it is nigh-on impossible to discern the hand of our loving Father in the strikes that we receive through the agency of such vile, satanic creatures as Stalin, Hitler, etc.

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The forces and circumstances that afflict us seem to have a life of their own.

Chessed and Gevurah

The source of all mundane tribulations is the divine attribute of gevurah.

Gevurah, translated as strength, justice or severity, is one of the ten sefirot (attributes or faculties) through which the Almighty interacts with creation. As a particular expression of G-dliness, gevurah represents perfect goodness just as do the other sefirot such as wisdom, kindness and mercy. Contrary to our intuition, gevurah is as much an expression of G-d's love as is chessed ("kindness"). Indeed, it is gevurah that complements and perfects chessed.

However, as manifestations of gevurah extend downward through successively lower levels of creation, they assume the properties of the worlds through which they descend, and thus become progressively distorted and coarsened. Ultimately, the influence of the divine attribute of gevurah is invested within, and gives rise to, what the Kabbalists call *gevurot kashot*—"harsh severities"—a medium in which divinity is concealed so deeply as to be completely unrecognizable. The cruel evils of this world, therefore, seem totally detached from any vestige of G-dly purpose, and they appear to exist and to function independently.

This apparent dissociation of worldly afflictions from their supernal source can be appreciated, to some extent, by means of an analogy. Consider a rabbinic court of wise and compassionate judges before whom stands an individual guilty of some heinous offense. The judges understand that in order to rectify the sin and to restore the spiritual integrity of the sinner's soul, lashes are required.

The judges abhor inflicting pain on anyone. Moreover, being extremely wise and learned, they could undoubtedly find a technicality on which to base an acquittal, thus saving the sinner from physical punishment and themselves from the anguish of causing physical suffering to another human.

The judges realize, however, that a man's spiritual life is at stake, and their love and compassion motivate them to disregard their own feelings and to save the sinning soul before them by ordering lashes.

Thus far there is only love, compassion and understanding. It is not, however, the judges, but rather a court-appointed official who carries out the sentence. This official was not privy to the judges' deliberations, and he knows nothing of the love, compassion and understanding which is the source and cause of the punishment. His job is to administer lashes, and he is only interested in the technical performance of his job. At this stage of the procedure, the judges are no longer a reality. The power and authority to dispense lashes, once the process has been initiated, falls to the official, who neither knows nor cares why he has been ordered to lash this particular individual.

In truth, the love and wisdom of the judges underlies the entire exercise. However, the traits that qualify men as judges render them uniquely unsuitable to administer lashes. Indeed, for the lashes to be effective and to thus achieve the desired result, namely the cleansing of a soul, they must be given by someone unimpeded by the refined sensibilities and the empathetic nature required to be a judge. Thus the ideal deputy through whom judges' prescription can be implemented is someone very different from the judges themselves.

Similarly, the divine attribute of gevurah, which is a particular manifestation of G-d's love and concern, of necessity appears removed from the very afflictions that it engenders. Were the hand of G-d perceivable in each of our travails, the authenticity of the ordeal would dissipate and our free will would be compromised, thus precluding the fierce inner struggle required for our intended spiritual rectification and growth. In short, there could be no transforming spiritual crisis, and subsequently, no redemptive possibilities within the experience.

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Thus, the earthly agents of suffering serve the crucial purpose of concealing the divine compassion at the core of the tribulations. In reality, however, they are nothing more than instruments of divine will, and they have no independent authority or autonomous existence.

Body and Soul

This is all very fine. There remains, however, one serious problem. In the analogies presented above, the subjects survive and benefit from their suffering. The child, saved from electrocution, can now safely grow up to lead a productive life. The erstwhile transgressor, relieved of the burden of sin, is transformed into an upstanding, valuable member of society.

But what about those who do not survive the cure? How can Jews killed by Hitler, Arafat or the Black Plague possibly profit from the experience?

The answer is quite simple: The premise on which the question is based is incorrect. No Jews died, nor ever will die. The G-dly soul, which is the reality of a Jew, is immortal.

Only the soul's body, which is to say, the Jew's circumstances, are subject to change.

The soul is capable of existing on a myriad of levels (this world, the Lower Garden of Eden, the Higher Garden of Eden, etc.). However, the soul itself, as an extension of pure G-dliness, is eternal and immutable. As far as the soul is concerned, the changing circumstances signify progressively loftier manifestations of its own essence.

Furthermore, a Jew's departure from this world is only temporary. The culmination of the soul's quest for ultimate self-realization is *tehiyat ha-meitim*, the resurrection of the dead. Thus "death" is simply one of the many varieties of ephemeral earthly afflictions that a soul experiences in order to achieve elevation, perfection and ultimate joy.

This is already abundantly apparent to those Jews who are, at present, unencumbered by a body. Although those of us currently residing in the physical world may have to wrestle with the problem of earthly suffering, souls see that no evil descends from on high. May the time soon arrive when this great truth is self-evident. ❖

"It would be desirable that you establish the custom of reciting Tehillim — at least a few kapitlach — in shul during the weekdays as well. Convey to the congregants the words that my revered father-in-law, the Rebbe, related: that reciting Tehillim protects [a person] from many undesirable matters and draws down abundant good for the needs of every single individual."

-- Lubavitcher Rebbe 16 Iyar, 5711

Pirkei Avos – Ethics of the Fathers

Pirkei Avos contains six chapters, and there are six Shabbats between Passover and Shavuot. Every Shabbat, customarily after the afternoon Minchah prayers, we study one chapter. After the Jews left Egypt, they embarked on a period of self-refinement and character improvement. This was critical in order that they be worthy of receiving the Torah on Shavuot. While counting the Omer, we too try to perfect our character. To assist in achieving this goal, we study Avos, the tractate which is devoted to piety, humility, kindness and ethics.

From Our Sages

G-d spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai, saying . . . (Leviticus 25:1)

What has the Sabbatical year to do with Mount Sinai? Were not all commandments given on Sinai? But the verse wishes to tell us: just as with the Sabbatical year both its general principle and its minute details were ordained on Mount Sinai, so, too, was it with all the commandments—their general principles as well as their minute details were ordained on Mount Sinai.

-- (Torat Kohanim; Rashi)

Rabbi Ishmael says: The general principles of the Torah were given at Sinai, and the details [when G-d spoke to Moses] in the Tent of Meeting.

Rabbi Akiva says: The general principles and the details were given at Sinai. They were then repeated in the Tent of Meeting, and enjoined a third time in the Plains of Moab (i.e., in Moses' narrative in the book of Deuteronomy).

-- (Talmud, Shabbat 6a)

Haftarah for Behar-Bechukosai in a Nutshell

Jeremiah 16:19-17:14

The haftarah discusses the punishments that await those who disregard G-d's law, and the blessings that are the lot of those who follow the Creator's wishes. This follows the theme of this week's Torah reading which details at length the blessings and curses.

The prophet Jeremiah rebukes the people of Israel for their idolatrous ways and for not having faith in G-d. He conveys G-d's words of wrath towards those who do not put their trust in Him — foretelling exile as their punishment — and of blessings for those who do.

"Cursed is the man who trusts in man and relies on mortal flesh for his strength, and whose heart turns away from the G-d. He shall be like a lone tree in the desert, and will not see when good comes, and will dwell on parched land in the desert, on salt-sodden soil that is not habitable. Blessed is the man who trusts in the G-d, to whom G-d will be his trust. For he shall be like a tree planted by the water, and which spreads its roots out into a stream, so it will not be affected when heat comes, and its leaves shall be green, and in the year of drought will not be anxious, neither shall it cease from bearing fruit."

The haftarah ends with the following poignant verses: "G-d who is the source of the hopes of Israel, all that forsake You shall be shamed, and they who turn away from me shall be marked out on the earth that they have forsaken G-d, the source of living waters. Heal me, O G-d, then shall I be healed; help me, then I shall be helped, for You are my praise!" ❖

From all of us at Anshei-Lubavitch, we hope and pray for the safety and health of you and your loved ones. May the Almighty protect us all and send complete healing to those who need healing. And may our world very soon find the ultimate cure to all diseases with the coming of Moshiach, sooner than we can imagine.

Good Shabbos to all!