

Gratitude from the Torah

By Rebbetzin Chana Bracha

Parashat Bechukotai

How Do the Curses Herald Eternal Hope for Redemption?

Elevating Ourselves to Becoming Immune to Curses

This morning, I got up on the wrong side of the bed. I had been lying awake during the night with gloomy thoughts about various matters that weren't going well in my personal and professional life. Being in shalom with others is of ultimate importance to me. Yet despite my best efforts to solve a dispute peacefully in a way, where both sides yield to the other for the sake of shalom, I hadn't been successful. What is worse, sadly 😞 there seems to be no prospect that this will ever happen. In response to my suggestion to work out an agreement that would make us both feel good about each other so that we would be able to greet each other with shalom while looking each other in the eye, I received a message, saying, "I am deliberating whether to find a way to force you to give me what I want or to let G-d demand your debt. I am personally not forgiving you." Being an energetically sensitive person, I'm concerned that this toxic message includes a curse. Although I've done spiritual healing for undoing the curse, I'm still apprehensive and my concern keeps me up at night. Every night I have this person in mind when reciting the prayer of forgiveness before going to sleep. How I wish this were mutual! When I woke up late groggy and irritated with little desire and focus to write my blog, I decided to pull myself up. It is known that when King David initiated his Tehillim with *Mizmor L'David*, (as opposed to when his Tehillim begins with *L'David Mizmor*), he elevated himself from depression through his melody. We can all be inspired and learn from King David to rise from whatever low we may find ourselves. Trying to unpack the hidden message in uncomfortable situations, and searching for the good points in ourselves and others is the key to personal elevation. I reminded myself, that although *Parashat Bechukotai* is known for its curses it actually opens with blessings if only we "follow Hashem's statutes and observe His commandments and perform them" (*Vayikra* 26:3). If we are clear that we are doing the right thing in Hashem's eyes nothing, and no one can harm us.

Why Does *Parashat Bechukotai* Mention Many More Curses than Blessings?

Parashat Bechukotai opens with ten verses of blessings followed by twenty-eight verses of curses. They include illness, famine, plague, desolation, and exile. We may wonder why the descriptions of the blessings are so lacking compared to the rich descriptions of the curses. Yet when we look deeper into the wording of the blessings and the curses respectively, we'll notice that the "blessing verses" come all at once, like an overflowing, boundless blessing of abundance. "If we follow Hashem faithfully" His endless blessings will immediately envelope us. This is because by walking with Hashem we remove the blocks that prevent us from receiving Hashem's infinite light and goodness which He constantly showers upon us. In contrast, the root of all curses is when we impede Hashem's blessings from entering our entire being, by entertaining negative emotions such as fear and anger and straying from the Torah path. Therefore, every curse is paraphrased with a precondition expressing various levels of blocks we cause upon ourselves by diverging from the way of G-d. Through His compassion, Hashem doesn't expend all the curses in one go. He starts with the less severe punishments to give us a chance to repent. If that doesn't help, He is compelled to administrate a stronger and more bitter medicine, each subsequent curse according to the level of the block our wrongdoing creates. Thus, if you count the verses that describe the curses themselves, and not the actions that brought about the curses (variations of "if you do not listen to Me"), it turns out that there are no more curses than

blessings. Furthermore, the numerous verses about the curses are actually blessings in disguise. They don't come all at once but in stages, starting with the mildest curses to teach us the gradual, involving process of constant assessment and hope that we mend our ways and open ourselves to receive Hashem's infinite light. Thus, in truth, the blessings far outweigh the curses. They permeate everything, infusing the world with their goodness. "I will surely open the floodgates of the heaven for you and pour down endless blessings upon you" (*Malachi 3:10*).

How do We Tap Into Eternal Hope Even Within Horrific Curses?

The curses culminate with Hashem's promise that He will never reject us no matter how far we have gone. His Presence follows us perpetually to whatever exile we must undergo:

ספר ויקרא פרק כו פסוק מד

וְאִם גַּם זֹאת בְּהִיוֹתְם בְּאֶרֶץ אֲבִיבֵיהֶם לֹא מֵאַסְתִּים וְלֹא גַעְלֹתִים לְכַלְתֶּם לְהַפֵּר בְּרִיתִי אִתְּם כִּי אֲנִי הַשֵּׁם
אֱלֹהֵיהֶם: (מה) וְזָכַרְתִּי לָהֶם בְּרִית רֵאשֻׁנִים אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִי אֶתְּם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לְעֵינֵי הַגּוֹיִם לְהִיּוֹת לָהֶם
לְאֱלֹהִים אֲנִי הַשֵּׁם:

"Yet, despite all this, while they are in the land of their enemies, I will not reject them... I will remember for them the covenant of their ancestors, whom I took out from Egypt in the eyes of the nations, to be their G-d. I am the Hashem" (*Vayikra 26:44-45*).

Rabbeinu Bachaya explains the unusual expression **וְאִם גַּם זֹאת** /*v'af gam zot* - "But despite all this" in depth. According to the simple meaning (*peshat*), it refers to G-d's promise to keep His Covenant with the Jewish people no matter what. From the kabbalistic perspective approach, the word **זֹאת/zot** refers to the Jewish people as understood from Tehillim 118:23 that we recite during Hallel: **מֵאֵת זֹאת** - "The Jewish people emanated from Hashem." Since we emanate from Hashem, we eternally carry an element of the Shechinah with us. Therefore, the Shechinah follows the Jewish people wherever they may be exiled. The preceding words **אֶף/af** and **גַּם/gam** refer to *Gevurah* and *Chesed* respectively. Interestingly **גַּם/gam** consists of the first two letters of **גְּמִילוּת הַסְּדִים/gemilut chassadim** - bestowal of loving/kindness (Based on Rabbeinu Bachaya, *Vayikra 26:44*). Perhaps our verse alludes to Hashem's eternal promise that even when (G-d forbid) a Jew rejects G-d, ("despite all this") Hashem will always remain our G-d. He will remember the covenant through judgment (**אֶף/af**), because we deserve it due to the merit of our Fathers, and He will never reject us - even if we don't deserve it - due to His loving/kindness (**גַּם/gam**). Thus, even the curses herald eternal hope for redemption. As Martin Luther King put it. "God is just. He may punish. He may hide His face. But He will not break His word. He will fulfill His promise. He will redeem His children. He will bring them home" (Quoted by Rav Jonathan Sacs, *The Birth of Hope, Bechukotai 5779*). Within G-d's justice resides His loving kindness even if we have betrayed the covenant Hashem never gives up on us. Eventually, we must all return home to the Torah and to the Promised Land.

Gratitude Focus for the Week of Parashat Behar -

Some Tips for How to Revert Negative Energy and Curses into Blessings

Although negative energy and curses exist, being too preoccupied with these matters makes us more susceptible to becoming victims. We can strengthen our immunity to negative energy by aligning ourselves with Hashem, and elevating our own energy through Emunah that whatever happens is from Hashem and for a reason. "The evil eye does not have power except over a person

whose eyes are blemished to look at a place unsuitable for him” (Rav Tzaddok of Lublin, *Yisrael Kedoshim* 6). When we do not look at what belongs to others and avoid sending out negative energy, negative energy will also have no power over us. Let us be particular never to send out negative energy to anyone! Note that negative energy has no power over the person who does not want to take nourishment from what does not belong to him (*Babylonian Talmud, Berachot* 20a).

- **Simply Look Into the Energy That You are** – Let your energy be an energy of love, empowerment, and wisdom. It’s the most powerful energy in the universe and it works to empower your energy. This powerful energy works immediately and will restore you and your life.
- **Strengthen Your Emunah and Ensure You are Acting According to Hashem’s Will** – The Evil Eye has no power over those whose robust sense of self-esteem does not let others dictate what is important and worthwhile. Being a person of great emunah and self-confidence, Yosef was not susceptible to negative energy. He was immune to what others thought about him, because of his strong connection to Hashem.
- **Recite *Birkat Kohanim* (the Kohanim Blessing) Twice** – to bless the person who sends out hateful energy or is really angry at you whether s/he expresses the anger or not.
- **Take three coins” (even as small as a dime (ten agurot) to give to charity** – to dissipate negativity from a particular person. Make a verbal intention as you drop each coin in the Tzedakka box: “This is for the nefesh of so-and-so (full name) daughter of so-and-so. This is for the Ruach, and the last one is on behalf of the Neshamah of the one sending the negative energy.
- **Keep a Kosher Mezuzah on Your Doorpost** – with the Name **ש-ד-י**/Shada-I written on its reverse side. The end letters of the word **ציר**/tzir - ‘adversary’ spells out **ש-ד-י**/Shada-i. **צדי, יוד, ריש**. This shows that Shada-i is in your *tzir* (adversary or in the hinge of your home), in the place of the mezuzah. This explains why we write **ש-ד-י**/Shada-i on the mezuzah on the backside of the word “and it shall be...” It is as if the Torah writes that Shada-i (G-d) shall be against your adversaries or in the hinge of your home to protect you (Chayim Vital, *Sha’ar Hahakdamot* 42b).