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Temple Beth Shalom

From the Bimah: Our Rabbi's Message

A Theology of Responsibility

Torah portion Bechukotai is the 33rd weekly portion in the Jewish Torah reading cycle. It is the 10th and last reading in the book of Leviticus. Found in the *Chumash* in Leviticus 26:3-27:34, at 78 verses it is another one of the shorter portions in the Torah reading cycle. In regular years, Bechukotai is often combined with the previous Torah portion, Behar. In years when a 13th month, Adar II, is added, Bechukotai is read alone.

The Torah portion begins, "*Im bechukotai telechu*—If you walk in my statutes" or alternately "by my decrees...." The passage goes on to enumerate the rewards that will accrue to the people of Israel for keeping God's laws, but also providing a list of some of the most dire consequences in the biblical text for breaking God's commandments. The Hebrew root of the parshah's name, Bechukotai, is *chuk* (*chet-quf*). Translated as "statute" or

"decree," the root literally means "engraved." This undoubtedly hearkens back to the idea that God's laws, the Ten Commandments, were engraved on stone tablets. Later sages have invoked the root meaning of the word to demonstrate that the Torah of Adonai is imprinted on an individual's soul. As Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi put it, "There is a dimension of Torah that is *chuk*, engraved in our being. There is a dimension of Torah which expresses a bond with God that is the very essence of the Jewish soul." ("Parshat Bechukotai In-Depth." www.chabad.org)

The rewards detailed in this Torah portion for the keeping of God's statutes are many and lush. It should also be pointed out that they are given by the Almighty in the first person. God says, "If you walk in my statutes and keep my commandments..., I will give you rains in their seasons..., the land will yield its produce..., the trees of the field will bear their fruit. Your threshing will last until your grape gathering, and grape gathering will last until sewing time. You will thus eat your food to the full and live securely in your land. I will also grant you peace in the

land.... I will also eliminate harmful beasts from the land, and no sword shall pass through your land.... You will chase your enemies, and they will fall before you.... I will make you fruitful and multiply you, and I will confirm my covenant with you I will make my dwelling among you.... I will also walk among you and be your God, and you shall be my people.” (Lev. 26:3-12)

The punishments ascribed for disobedience to God’s laws are devastating to the point of being catastrophic. Again, they are stated by the Almighty in the first person, “But if you do not obey me and do not carry out all these commandments..., I will appoint over you a sudden terror, consumption and fever that shall waste away.... You shall sow your seed uselessly, for your enemies will eat it up. You shall be struck down before your enemies, and those who hate you shall rule over you, and you shall flee when no one is pursuing you. Your land shall not yield its produce and the trees of the land shall not yield their fruit. ... I will let loose among you the beasts of the field which shall bereave you of your children and destroy your cattle and reduce your number so that your roads lie deserted.” (26:14-22) It gets far worse, but let this suffice for our discussion now.

The blessings and curses enumerated in this passage

have sparked the ages-long debate over whether these rewards and consequences are to be taken naturally or supernaturally. The supernatural view would envision an omnipotent God sitting in the heavens dealing out divine judgments for obedience or rebellion. A more natural view would assert that a mindful Creator has built into the universe certain laws of cause and effect that cannot be abrogated. One cannot jump out of a second-story window, for example, and expect not to smack into the ground. Actions have consequences. As Rabbi Jonathan Sacks puts it, “You cannot over eat and take no exercise, and at the same time stay healthy.



You cannot act selfishly and win the respect of other people. You cannot allow injustices to prevail and sustain a cohesive society. You cannot let rulers use power for their own ends without destroying the basis of

a free and gracious social order.” (“Bechukotai—The Politics of Responsibility,” www.aish.com) There is nothing necessarily supernatural about these consequences, but as Rabbi Sacks points out they are absolutely moral.

One of the many things I love about progressive Judaism is that it gives to every individual the freedom to choose whether a supernatural, natural, some combination or even neither of the two views of positive and negative consequences resonates best with his or her conscience and convictions. Regardless of the view one chooses, it cannot be denied that this concept of justice, *tzedeq*—“doing the right thing,” has been *chuk*—engraved on the Jewish conscience from ancient times. The Torah’s view of individual and corporate responsibility as it relates to social justice is deeply ingrained. The rich cannot buy special favors, nor should the poor be deferred to on account of their poverty. Every soul is an indispensable part of the social fabric and should be treated as such. The needs of one are seen as the needs of all. This Jewish sense of individual and corporate responsibility, purpose, and destiny is very succinctly stated in the words of the British Catholic historian,

Paul Bede Johnson:

No people has ever insisted more firmly than the Jews that history has a purpose and humanity a destiny. At a very early stage in their collective existence they believed they had detected a divine scheme for the human race of which their own society was to be a pilot. They worked out their role in immense detail. They clung to it with heroic persistence in the face of savage suffering. Many of them believe it still. Others transmuted into Promethean endeavors to raise our condition by purely human means. The Jewish vision became the prototype for many similar grand designs for humanity, both divine and man-made. The Jews, therefore, stand right at the center of the perennial attempt to give human life the dignity of a purpose. (*A History of the Jews*, p. 2, Harper Perennial, 1988)

In affirming Mr. Johnson’s historical analysis, I attempted to find words to inspire my readers to take the precepts of the holy Torah to a new level, applying them daily in their own lives in ways that are meaningful to them. But, I am hard-pressed to find words more moving than those already written by Rabbi

Jonathan Sacks in his comment on Johnson’s observation:

The people who change the world are those who believe that life has a purpose, a direction, a destiny. They know where they want to go and what they want to achieve. In the case of Judaism that purpose is clear: to show what it is to create a small clearing in the desert of humanity where freedom and order coexist, where justice prevails, the weak are cared for and those in need are given help, where we have the humility to attribute our successes to God and our failures to ourselves, where we cherish life as the gift of God and do all we can to make it holy. In other words: precisely the opposite of the violence and brutality that is today being perpetrated by some religious extremists in the name of God. (“Bechukotai—A Sense of Direction,” www.aish.com)

All I can add is...*Ken yehi ratzon*—May this be God’s will!



President’s Message

Barbara Laufer, TBS President

This will be my last message as your president, and it has been an honor. It has been a fast two years, and I appreciate all the support I received which made the job much easier. The Annual meeting was very productive, and I am delighted to welcome new Board of Trustees members: Gavi Crater, who will serve as Vice-President; and Karen Ferguson, who will serve as bulletin editor. Marsue Davidson, our very own Energizer bunny, will be the new President and continue to be active in the Sunday school.

The security committee, chaired by Larry Laufer, has been very active, and there have been multiple efforts to make the temple as secure as possible. Motion sensor lights have been installed all around the temple, security system is upgraded, remote video monitoring of the temple installed, improved

emergency exit and blackout lights, parking lights upgraded, extensive trimming of trees and shrubs around the patio, and a safe for the Torah are just some of the changes made.

Thanks to the committee for their hard work and thanks to your incredible Board of Trustees for supporting these efforts. The new siddurs have been a blessing, and the feedback has been very positive. Thanks to an anonymous donor the Temple Beth Shalom street sign has been replaced. Thank you to all members who continue to support the temple and my wish would be for each of you to attend services with our very own Rabbi, Dennis Jones, who continues to gently lead us. If there is anything you would like us to consider doing in the next year, please let us know.

Last but not least I want to thank Robyn Diamond and Whitney Dominique for their service on the Board.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Congratulations to Tim Stinson on his Bar Mitzvah

Appreciation to Karina Vishnya for the donation to honor her daughter, Gabriella Cantore, on her upcoming Bat Mitzvah.

Anyone interested in a Torah Study group should notify President Barb Laufer (blaufer@ahrs.net)

It is time to update our Temple Beth Shalom Life Cycle Events. Please forward to Barbara Laufer, President, and Marsue Davidson, bulletin editor, your family events to update our database.

We do not want to miss anyone's Birthday, Anniversary or most importantly Yahrzeit.

We would also like to update our email list, so if you have any changes in your emails, please forward to MarsueDav@aol.com and blaufer@ahrs.net

TEMPLE BETH SHALOM BOARD

The temple board members would like to thank Barbara for all her hard work and dedication to Temple Beth Shalom. We have accomplished so much in the last 2 years and we are very thankful for all you have done for our congregation.

Our next TBS board meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, June 1st, at 7 pm. As a reminder, all TBS Board meetings are open to all Temple members. Please feel free to join us and share any thoughts.

Every board member is open to suggestions and thoughts so we may continue to improve your spiritual experiences.

TEMPLE BOARD MEMBERS

Our new 2016-2017 Temple Beth Shalom Board effective July 1, 2016.

Marsue Davidson, President
Gavi Carter, Vice President
Tiffany Hull, Secretary
Mark Faruque, Treasurer

Members at Large:

- Barbara Laufer
- Rabbi Dennis Jones
- Karen Ferguson
- Debra Engelmann
- Aaron Tosky
- Liz Correll
- Lin Gentry
- Sandy Guttler
- Pam Jones
- Susan Rieder
- Marion DuBow



Temple Beth Shalom Sunday School Program

Marsue Davidson, Sunday school Chair

The 2016 Sunday school class is about to graduate. This year has been so successful, and the children of Temple Beth Shalom are amazing. We are so proud of what they have accomplished.

Our graduates will be taking a year-end exam and demonstrating all they have learned over the last year here at Temple Beth Shalom. We will be handing out certificates and taking pictures of our graduating class.

We have a fun interactive brain game planned for the final session on June 5th at 10:30 am. They will have to complete many tasks to graduate and obtain a certificate of completion from Temple Beth Shalom Sunday School program. It will be a lot of fun and the kids are ready to share their knowledge and Jewish heritage.

We have also planned our end of year BBQ that same day and will have a luncheon with favorite dishes to celebrate all the children have accomplished.

All the families and children of TBS Sunday School program would like to thank Dennis, Kathy and Heidi for all their hard work throughout the year providing instructional activities and focused learning for all the students of all ages

at TBS. Dennis is working diligently with the older children, and we all looking forward to Gabriella's and Alec's Bar and Bat Mitzvah.

TBS Sisterhood

Lin Gentry, Sisterhood President

Sisterhood says thank you to those who brought items for our yard sale. Thanks you also to those who come on both days of the yard sale to work so hard selling, buying items and cleaning up. Sisterhood really appreciates you!!

Our next meeting will be Monday, June 13 at 6:30 pm at NY Hibachi Buffet on Hwy 70. Please let me know if you're coming so I can tell the restaurant. The first person to email me the word socialism will win a bloody fantastic prize.

If you're interested in serving as sisterhood president next year, please let me know. If you have ideas for things that sisterhood could do next year, let us know--whether it's spiritual, service, or social.



Harriet Sederholm Scholarship Fund

The Sederholm Scholarship was established by a long-standing Temple member, Burt Sederholm, to honor his wife Harriet, who died shortly after her retirement from work in Hickory. Mr. Sederholm's efforts provided the initial funding from generous family members and friends, and it has been added to it over the years. The scholarship is available to students. Temple members are looked upon favorably, but one does not need to be a temple member nor Jewish to apply. The scholarship fund dividends are used to provide scholarship awards. Candidates may submit an essay to any one of the committee members. The essay will explain who the candidate is, what they are doing currently, what their plans are for the future, how the scholarship funds will be used and, if applicable, what the connection may be to Jewish life.

Interested students should submit their essay by April 30th. The scholarship season runs from May 1-April 30. All applicants will be notified in writing if their application has been approved or declined by May 15th. Awards should be mailed to recipients by May 31st.

The essay should be emailed to any of the committee members Lin Gentry, Julie Owens or Sandy Guttler.

Naturally, the committee encourages everyone to make a tax-deductible donation to the Scholarship Fund at any time.

Temple Beth Shalom Life Cycle Events

Birthdays

Julia Gold 6/4
Connie Tosky 6/14
Heidi Jones Reed 6/14
Sandy Shubin 6/14
Esther Greene 6/16
Sandy Guttler 6/22
Emily Sullivan 6/27

Anniversaries

Dennis/Kathy Jones 6/9
Rich/Deb Engelmann 6/10
Lin/Frank Gentry 6/14

Yahrzeits

Massie Hull 6/11
Stephen Schonberg 6/24
Libby Simmons
Harry Leifer 6/1

TBS Member Business Directory

Dr. Ron DuBow
Internist, Geriatric
Specialist (elderly care),
Pediatrician
2651 Morganton Blvd SW
Lenoir, NC 28645
828-757-8950
Marsue Davidson, RN DCS
EPIC HEALTH SERVICES
805 W. 25th Street
Newton, NC 28681
828-464-0244
www.unifournursing.net

**Robyn Diamond, Certified
Health, and Wellness Coach**
Specializing in Digestive
Health and Stress
Management
843-991-6338
Robyn@HealthHappyYou.com
www.HealthHappyYou.com

Dr. Laura Faruque
A Women's View
915 Tate Blvd SE
Suite170
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828-345-0800

**Dr. Mark Faruque of
Bethlehem Family Practice**
174 Bolick Lane Suite 202
Taylorsville NC 28681
828-495-8226

Marc Fedder M.C., F.A.C.P.
**Frye Care Internal Medicine
of Hickory**
915 Tate Blvd Suite 186
Hickory, N.C., 28602
828-303-2131

Professor Gitlin
Hebrew Lessons
109 6th Ave NE
Hickory, NC 28601
828-328-9443

**Alice Guy of
The Hickory Wine Shoppe**
238 Union Square NW
Hickory, NC 28601
828-334-4441
Info@HickoryWine.com

Michelle Oxenberg Jordon
Managing Director of
Design
3166 Main Ave. S.E.
Hickory, North Carolina 28602
828.322.3480 Ext. 271
michelle@robertabbey.com
www.robertabbey.com

**Scott and Julie Owens of
Taste Full Beans**
29 2nd Street NW
Hickory, NC 28601
828-325-0108
www.tastefullbeans.com

Schedule for Rabbi Services and Sunday School 2015-2016

DATES		SERVICES SCHEDULE	NEWSLETTER DEADLINES
June	3	Friday Night Services	May 21
	4	Saturday Morning Services/Gabriella Vishnya Bat Mitzvah	
	5	Sunday School Graduation and End of Year Party	
	11	7:00 Erev Shavuot Service (Saturday night)	
August	12	Friday Night Services	July 29
	13	Saturday Morning Services/Alec Davidson Bar Mitzvah	