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LIKKUTEI SICHOS

AN ANTHOLOGY OF TALKS

by the

Lubavitcher Rebbe

Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson

Reprinted for Parshat Behar-Bechukotai, 5781
(Vol. 34-35)



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VAAD L'HAFOTZAS SICHOS

788 Eastern Parkway, Brooklyn, NY 11213

5770 • 2010

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Printed in the U.S.A.

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Los Angeles, California

LIKKUTEI SICHOT

AN ANTHOLOGY OF TALKS

RELATING TO THE WEEKLY SECTIONS OF THE TORAH AND
SPECIAL OCCASIONS IN THE JEWISH CALENDAR

by the

Lubavitcher Rebbe

Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson

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Volume VIII: *Vayikra*

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In English rendition

by

Rabbi Eliyahu Touger

BEHAR

THE COST OF LENDING AT INTEREST

This week's Torah reading includes the prohibition against giving or taking interest.¹ The passage concludes:² "I am G-d your L-rd who took you out of the land of Egypt... to be your G-d."

On this verse, the *Sifra* comments:

From this verse [we may derive the principle]: Whoever accepts the yoke of [the prohibition of] interest accepts the yoke of heaven. Whoever casts off the yoke of [the prohibition of] interest casts off the yoke of heaven....

For whoever acknowledges the *mitzvah* of interest acknowledges the exodus from Egypt. Whoever denies the *mitzvah* of interest is as if he denies the exodus from Egypt.

We must understand: Why is the prohibition against interest so closely related to the exodus from Egypt and the acceptance of the yoke of heaven? *Rashi*³ explains that just as at the time of the exodus, G-d differentiated between the first-born and all others, so too, He will be able to pick out a Jew

Our generation is the last generation of exile and the first generation of Redemption, as proclaimed and announced by my sainted father-in-law, the leader of our generation, the Yosef of our generation (named after the first Yosef who proclaimed and announced that "G-d will surely remember you and bring you up from this land to the land that was sworn to Avraham, to Yitzchak and the Yaakov"¹). For all our deeds and Divine service have already been completed, all appointed times have already passed, teshuvah has already been done, and all the preparations have already been finished In a manner of "great preparation," all is ready for the festive meal² of the time to come, Livyosan, Shor Habor³ and Yayin Meshumar.⁴

(From the talk of the 10th of Teves (may it be transformed into rejoicing), and Shabbos Parshas Vayechi, 14 Teves 5752)

1. Both the lender and the borrower are liable, as reflected in *Devarim* 23:20. See *Shulchan Aruch HaRav, Hilchos Ribis*.
 2. *Vayikra* 25:38.
 3. In his commentary to the above verse, based on *Bava Metzia* 61b.

1. Our Parsha 50:24.
 2. Based on the expression of our Sages, of blessed memory - Avos, chapter 3, Mishneh 16. Sanhedrin 38a and Rashi's commentary.
 3. See *Bava Basra* 75a. And *Vayikra Rabba* chapter 13:3.
 4. *Brochos* 34:b. See there for cross references.

king"¹¹ has acquired an exclusively **positive** connotation, one that is **visibly and manifestly good, even to eyes of flesh**. In the words of our sages:¹² The Holy One Blessed be He says to Israel, "My children have no fear. All that I have done¹³ I have done exclusively for you... the time of your Redemption has arrived."

The emphasis of this generation - particularly this year, the year designated as "It shall be a year of wonders I will show him" - should be placed on the concept of G-d's support of those who have fallen,¹⁴ to strengthen and encourage the Jewish people, emphasizing particularly the support and encouragement acquired through faith in the coming of Moshiach and the implicit trust that "behold he (our righteous Moshiach) is coming."¹⁵ This should be accompanied with enhanced preparation for his arrival by way of teshuvah [repentance, return] and observance of Torah and mitzvos. In the words of the pronouncement of my sainted father-in-law - the leader of our generation: "immediate Teshuvah, immediate Redemption."¹⁶ "Return, O, Israel, unto G-d your G-d; prepare yourselves and your family to greet our righteous Moshiach, who shall arrive soon, in the most literal sense."¹⁷

*(From the talks of Shabbos Parshas Vayechi
(and Asara b'Teves, may it be transformed into joy) 5751)*

11. *Yechezkal* 24:2.

12. *Yalkut Shimoni, Yeshayahu* 499.

13. This includes the efforts of the Babylonian King, who is merely an ax in the hands of the one who chops with it. [i.e. He is G-d's instrument.]

14. [The phrase *סומך נפלים* - "supports the falling" - is similar to the expression mentioned before - *בבל מלך בבל* - the Babylonian King besieged," which the Rebbe interpreted in a positive vein to mean that "he supported." Translator's note.]

15. *Shir HaShirim* 2:8. See *Shir HaShirim Rabbah* on this verse (2:8(b)).

16. In his *Igros Kodesh*, vol. 5, end of p. 361 ff., 377 ff., 408 ff. and in other places.

17. *Hayom Yom* - 15 Teves.

who lends money to a colleague and attempts to excuse himself by saying that the money belongs to a non-Jew.

This insight is, however, insufficient, because it relates only to one aspect of prohibition against interest — lending with interest while claiming that the money belongs to a gentile. Moreover, even in that instance, it does not apply in an instance when the lender makes that statement to mislead a mortal, e.g., if the borrower knew that the money belonged to a Jew, he would not take the loan, or the court would not allow the loan to be given. It is applicable only when the lender states that the money belongs to a non-Jew, thinking that G-d will not make a distinction regarding the matter. As such, he denies the exodus at which time, G-d did make fine distinction.

Moreover this does not, however, deal with the connection between the prohibition against interest and the exodus as a whole, nor does it mention the connection between interest and the denial of the yoke of heaven.

There are commentators who explain that when a Jew lends a fellow Jew money without interest, he does not consider the profit he could have made with the funds. Helping a fellow Jew without seeking profit thus reflects his trust in G-d and his acceptance of the yoke of heaven. In contrast, when a person lends money at interest, he shows that he does not trust G-d, and thus casts off the yoke of heaven.

But this interpretation leaves room for questions:

a) It places the emphasis on the person's trust in G-d (or lack of it), and not on his acceptance or rejection of the yoke of heaven;

b) This trust — or lack of trust — is not directly connected with the question of interest, but rather with the *mitzvah* of doing deeds of kindness. Before mentioning the

prohibition against taking interest, the Torah reading states:⁴ “When your brother will become impoverished... you should support him.” This implies that one should lend him money without interest.

When a person, concerned about his own livelihood, refuses to give an interest-free loan because he desires to do business (or earn money) with every last penny of his resources, he shows a lack of trust in G-d. He has not, however, violated the prohibition against interest, since he did not give the poor person the loan.

A TWOFOLD DYNAMIC — EARNING ONE’S KEEP

Accepting G-d’s yoke as expressed in the observance of the *mitzvos* implies that G-d takes an active role in a Jew’s Divine service. This is hinted at in the blessing we recite before performing a *mitzvah*, when we praise G-d “who sanctified us with *His* commandments,” i.e., the *mitzvos* we perform are *His mitzvos*; He *also* performs them.⁵

There are two dimensions to G-d’s performance of *mitzvos*:⁶

a) G-d’s performance of the *mitzvos* precedes the performance of the *mitzvos* by the Jewish people, as reflected in our Sages’ statement:⁷ “*What He does*, He commands Israel to do”;

b) His performance of the *mitzvos* is in response to the observance of the *mitzvos* by the Jewish people, as reflected in

4. Vayikra 25:35.

5. See Likkutei Torah, Devarim 9d, Shir HaShirim 12a.

6. See the *sichah* for Pesach in this series, where this concept is explained and sources are provided.

7. *Shmos Rabbah* 30:9; the *Jerusalem Talmud*, *Rosh HaShanah* 1:3.

were previously a perfectly wicked person, she is betrothed, for perhaps he had a thought of teshuvah."

Considering the above, it is with utmost certainty that our righteous Moshiach must arrive **here and now, immediately, [mamosh] in the most literal sense.**

Now, this exercise of finding merit⁷ in and of itself should suffice to bring about the Redemption. Moreover, in addition to the finding of merit, the imminence of Moshiach's arrival constitutes a **definitive ruling issued by many rabbis and halachic authorities.** Further, since Torah "is not in heaven,"⁸ this ruling issued by the earthly courts "obligates," so to speak, and affords a unique privilege to, the heavenly courts. **And so it will be confirmed!**

* * *

In our day and age, after G-d has vented His rage with the destruction of the Holy Temple, and after all of "our deeds and actions throughout the duration of exile,"⁹ and after all the decrees of oppression and persecution - may Hashem, indeed, shield us and protect us from them - the Jewish people have endured throughout the protracted and arduous final exile, particularly the Holocaust of the very last generation, the process of refinement and purification has, without any doubt, been achieved in full, "enough and even too much." Consequently, the [current¹⁰] "siege of the Babylonian

7. [i.e., that we have already passed all the deadlines as well as satisfying the condition of Teshuvah. Translator's note.]

8. *Netzavim*, 30:12. See *Bava Metzia* 59b.

9. *Tanya*, beginning of chapter 37.

10. [The Hebrew term *Samach*, which means "besieged," can also be rendered "supported." This talk was delivered on the fast day *Asara b'Teves* (the Tenth of the month of Teves), the anniversary of the siege of Jerusalem by the Babylonian king. The Rebbe here is alluding to the threats of the modern day Babylonian dictator, which are actually the events which serve as preludes to the Redemption. Translator's note.]

The Announcement Of The Redemption

11

With respect to Gideon, we find that: "In his days¹ the Jewish people were in distress. The Holy One, Blessed be He, sought a person who would find merit in them. When He found Gideon to be meritorious, because he found merit in them, an angel immediately appeared to him, as it says: "And the angel of G-d appeared to him and said to him, 'Go with this power, with **the power of the merit you have found in my children.**" "Said the Holy One, Blessed be He, it is within your capacity to find a defense for Israel. **In your merit they shall be redeemed.**"²

...The merit which will hasten the Redemption is the following:

Even in the Talmudic era it has been said that "all the deadlines have passed."³ Certainly now that we have endured a lengthy and arduous exile, the duration of which has exceeded 1,900 years, **and he has still not arrived...** And in regard to Teshuvah ("It depends only on Teshuvah³) [repentance, return, a prerequisite for Redemption], they have already done Teshuvah. Indeed, there is no Jewish person who has not entertained a thought of Teshuvah, (not just once, but) several times in the course of his lifetime. This [thought of Teshuvah] can transform "instantaneously"⁴ a perfectly wicked person into a perfectly righteous individual, in accordance with the Talmudic ruling⁵ that one who would betroth a woman "stipulating that I am a (perfectly⁶) righteous individual, even if he

our Sages' statement:⁸ "Whenever a person studies the Torah, the Holy One, blessed be He, studies opposite him."

Of course, the fact that our deeds prompt G-d to perform the *mitzvos* is no indication that we are independently capable of *causing* G-d to act. Rather, the causation is possible only because G-d desires that our deeds influence Him, so to speak.

This requires explanation: Why does G-d want the Divine service of mere mortals to exert influence in the spiritual realms? The first phase of the dynamic — that *His* observance of the *mitzvos* brings about *our* observance — can be understood; His deeds generate the power needed for us to act. But what is the explanation for the second phase — that our observance prompts His?

Before going any further, a basic question must be answered: Why is Divine service necessary at all? Let G-d give us everything as a reflection of His beneficence! We are taught that the world was created because of the Divine initiative "to act benevolently to His created beings."⁹ Since G-d is the ultimate good, and "it is the nature of the benevolent to act kindly,"¹⁰ why shouldn't He grant His creations everything they need without demanding anything in return?

In response, *Chassidus* explains that the ultimate expression of kindness is to have the recipient *earn* the good which he receives. A gift dispensed gratis, without the recipient having to exert himself, is regarded as "bread of shame."¹¹ G-d desires to give the Jews the *ultimate* good. Therefore He struc-

1. *Tanchuma, Shoftim* 4.
 2. *Yalkut Shimoni, Shoftim* 62.
 3. *Sanhedrin* 97b.
 4. *Zohar* I, 129, end side a.
 5. *Kiddushin* 49b. Rambam, *Hilchos Ishus*, 8:5. *Tur, Shulchan Aruch, Even HoEzer*, 38:31.
 6. Based on the version cited on *Or Zarua* 112.

8. *Tanna d'Bei Eliyahu Rabbah*, ch. 18; *Yalkut Shimoni, Eichah*, sec. 1034.
 9. *Eitz Chayim, Shaar HaKlallim*.
 10. *Chacham Tzvi, Responsa* 18; *Shomer Emunim* 2:14.
 11. Cf. the *Jerusalem Talmud, Orlah* 1:3; *Likkutei Torah, Vayikra* 7d.

tured the world in such a manner that they *earn* Divine influence.

On this basis, we can appreciate why the Jews' Divine service creates repercussions in the spiritual realms. Were a person to receive payment for work which did not benefit his employer, the payment is still tainted. For when the recipient knows that the work for which he is being paid is of no consequence, he feels that he does not deserve any reward; he has not truly earned it.

For this reason, G-d structured existence in such a way that the Divine service of the Jewish people has an effect in the spiritual realms, bringing about a spiritual equivalent to the actions performed on earth. Therefore the reward a Jew receives is not "bread of shame," but payment received for doing something of value to his Employer.¹²

WHEN THERE IS NO GRAIN TO CUT

There is another dimension to the above concept: When a task is not productive, a worker will not derive any satisfaction from his labor even if he is amply rewarded. He will work, but without energy or pleasure. The task will become burdensome, "backbreaking toil."¹³

My revered father-in-law, the Rebbe, illustrated this concept with an analogy.¹⁴ A landowner once called a peasant and

12. The value of our deeds is not inherent to the deeds themselves, for as mentioned above, the Creator cannot be compared to the created, though the latter is endowed by virtue of His will. Nevertheless, G-d's will has endowed the deeds of the created beings with importance. As such, once that will has been expressed, this pattern is ingrained within existence. See a parallel concept cited in *Derech Mitzvosecha*, p. 54b.

13. See *Toras Kohanim, Vayikra 25:43*, quoted by *Rashi*. See also the *maamar* entitled *Karov Havayah*, 5690, sec. 2 (*Sefer HaMaamarim Kuntreisim*, Vol. I, p. 105b).

14. *Sefer HaSichos 5696*, p. 114ff.

until we reach a level which transcends all possible progress — "the day which is all *Shabbos* and rest for life-everlasting."²²

(Adapted from *Sichos Shabbos Parshas Bechukosai*, 5722)



22. The conclusion of tractate *Tamid*.

which one previously had to accept on faith come within one's conceptual grasp, and one's faith thus can rise upward.

This paradigm enables us to understand the concept of progress with regard to *chukim*. As one's understanding of the *mitzvos* grows, one's conception of the *chukim* should also change. Practices which one previously accepted as *chukim* should be shifted from that category, and comprehended intellectually.

We see this pattern expressed by Moshe. At the outset, he, like others, viewed the laws of the Red Heifer as a *chok*. After he advanced in his Divine service, G-d told him: "I will reveal the rationale for the Red Heifer to you."¹⁸ From that time onward, Moshe could no longer consider the laws of the Red Heifer a *chok*. This is not to say that Moshe lacked the depth of commitment associated with *chukim*. Instead, the intent is that his appreciation of *chukim* shifted to a higher plane.

Similarly, every person must advance his understanding each day, and as a result, "proceed in My statutes" by coming to an ever-higher appreciation of *chukim*.¹⁹

Similar concepts apply with regard to labor in Torah study. What was yesterday considered a strain must today be considered natural, and one should set one's sights on further horizons.

And this will lead to G-d's blessings: "I will give you rain in its season," and "I [will] lead you upright,"²⁰ to *Eretz Yisrael* in the ultimate Redemption. At that time, we will proceed without bounds, going from strength to strength,²¹

18. *Bamidbar Rabbah* 19:6.

19. See the *sichah* to *Parshas Emor* in this series, note 11, which explains a similar concept.

20. *Vayikra* 26:13.

21. *Tehillim* 84:8.

asked him to work for him. The peasant would "harvest" grain, but instead of swinging his sickle in the field, he would swing it in the landlord's drawing room. The landowner promised to pay generously for this "work."

At first, the peasant eagerly agreed, but he soon begged to be relieved, explaining that he had nothing to show for his work.

Similarly, in the analogue, when a Jew knows that his Divine service evokes a similar response in the spiritual realms, this knowledge infuses his efforts with energy and satisfaction, giving him the power to overcome the challenges posed by the evil inclination.¹⁵ For he senses that his Divine service affects the very essence of G-d, as it were.

TAKING G-D AS A PARTNER

All the Divine influence felt in this world depends on the efforts of the Jewish people. Every *mitzvah* has a unique influence, for the expression of a particular *mitzvah* in the spiritual realms is dependent on the performance of that *mitzvah* by the Jewish people. Moreover, in a more general sense, the very fact that the Divine service of the Jewish people has an effect in the spiritual realms is also a function of that Divine service, and is reflected in the *mitzvah* prohibiting interest.

What is interest? Receiving profit for lending money, i.e., the lender receives profit because the money lent once belonged to him. By giving the borrower money, the lender enables him to do business, and that is considered reason enough for the borrower to pay interest.

Thus observing the prohibition against interest means taking profit only from one's present possessions. This is the

15. See the *maamar* entitled *Vayikach Haman (Hosafos L'Torah Or)*.

dynamic underlying a *heter iska*, which allows one to receive a certain return from the money one invests. In a *heter iska*, a certain portion of the money that changes hands remains the lender's; it is merely entrusted to the borrower. So when the borrower does business with the funds, he is also doing business with the share belonging to the lender, and the profit the lender receives is thus earned by the money which actually belongs to him. Similar principles apply with regard to the renting of animals or utensils.

The relationship between one Jew and his colleague is mirrored in the relationship he shares with the spiritual realms. If he transgresses the prohibition against interest, i.e., if he takes profit for resources only because they were once his, a similar pattern is followed in the spiritual realms. There is no active investment from above in his Divine service.¹⁶ He

16. On this basis, we can appreciate why a person who lends money at interest will not arise at the time of the Resurrection of the Dead (*Shulchan Aruch HaRav, Hilchos Ribis*, Law 2; see *Shmos Rabbah* 31:15; *Hosafos liYerushalmi*, the conclusion of the tractate *Berachos*; *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer*, the conclusion of ch. 33).

A *mitzvah* involves taking a material entity (whose existence is temporal, identified with death) and making it a medium for holiness (identified with life and eternity). See the *maamar* entitled *Shuvah Yisrael*, 5695 (*Sefer HaMaamarim Kuntresim*, Vol. II, p. 658). This in turn brings about the resurrection of the dead in the world at large.

The Divine service of created beings is by nature limited. The dimension of timelessness and infinity drawn down by the *mitzvos* (see *Tanya*, ch. 25) is endowed by the connection established by the *mitzvos* with G-d, who is described as “the G-d of life.” (Indeed, the very word *mitzvah* is associated with the term *tzavsa*, meaning “connection.”) This connection draws down eternity from above, causing G-d to perform the spiritual parallels of the *mitzvah*.

When a person lends money at interest, he prevents the investment of G-dly energy in his efforts. Thus his conduct constitutes the direct opposite of the resurrection of the dead.

Indeed, he thereby saps the energy of holiness. This is implied by the Hebrew term for interest, *neshech*, which literally means “bite.” And by sapping holiness in this manner, “from the destruction of Jerusalem is built Tzur” (*Yahel Or* 15, 1:4), a city identified with *kelipah* and death.

bechukosai, he will be rewarded with the potential to “proceed,” to make further progress.

This, however, represents a departure from the simple meaning of the text. When teaching the verse to a child, the term “proceed” refers to our Divine service, and the description of the reward begins with “I will provide you with rain in its season.”¹²

SHIFTING PLATEAUS

In *Likkutei Torah*,¹³ it is explained that faith relates primarily to those levels of G-dliness which cannot be grasped conceptually. The levels of G-dliness which *can* be understood, *must* be understood. It is only after arriving at a consummate understanding of those levels which intellect can reach that the true concept of faith comes into play.

This is the difference between the faith of the Jewish people and the faith of the non-Jewish nations.¹⁴ Non-Jews believe in the levels of G-dliness that can be perceived by intellect — the G-dliness which “fills up all worlds.”¹⁵ This is not true faith. Jewish faith, by contrast, centers on the level of G-dliness which transcends intellectual comprehension, the G-dliness which “encompasses all worlds.”¹⁶

With regard to intellectual comprehension, it is always possible to ascend from one level to another, as implied by the verse:¹⁷ “Days shall speak, and the multitude of years will communicate wisdom.” As one’s understanding grows, one’s faith should be directed to ever-higher plateaus. Matters

12. *Vayikra* 26:4.

13. *Devarim* 4a; *Derech Mitzvosecha*, p. 45a ff.

14. See *Siddur Im Dach*, *Shaar Chag HaMatzos*.

15. [*Memale kol almin* in the Hebrew original.]

16. [*Sovev kol almin* in the Hebrew original.]

17. *Iyov* 32:7.

He must seek to understand, not because of the resultant intellectual satisfaction, but because G-d commanded that he comprehend what he studies.

For this reason he “labors” in Torah study, applying himself more than would be his natural tendency. Were his study to be motivated by only personal satisfaction, his commitment to study would be proportionate to the satisfaction he receives; he would not labor beyond his ordinary pattern.

On this basis, we can appreciate the connection between the two interpretations. Studying Torah with the commitment of *chukim* involves labor. This enables one’s study to be internalized until it is “engraved,” and the person and the Torah become an integral whole.

MAKING PROGRESS

The other term in the opening phrase of the Torah reading: “If you proceed,” is also worthy of attention. Proceeding implies a framework in which there are separate levels (e.g., separate rungs within the cosmic order of existence, the *Seder HaHishtalshelus*, or different attributes among the range of the powers of our soul), and a person proceeds from level to level, for example, from a lower level of love to a higher level, or from a lesser intellectual rung to a higher one.

How is it possible to make progress within the commitment of *kabbalas ol*? Since *kabbalas ol* transcends intellect, how is it possible for one level to be different than another?

In *Likkutei Torah*, the Alter Rebbe explains that the word “proceed” refers to the reward for our Divine service. If a person labors in the study of Torah with the commitment of

is given resources, — i.e., the *mitzvos* are performed in the spiritual realms — before he begins his Divine service, endowing him with power, but he is given no more than that.

When, by contrast, a person observes the prohibition against interest, G-d invests in him. Not only does He endow the person with potential before he begins his Divine service, but G-d remains an active partner. “The Holy One, blessed be He, studies opposite him.”

On this basis, we can appreciate the connection between the prohibition against interest, the acceptance of the yoke of heaven, and the exodus from Egypt. The prohibition against interest is of all-embracing significance,¹⁷ reflecting the active partnership of G-d in one’s Divine service, an expression of the acceptance of G-d’s yoke. And by establishing such a connection with G-d, a person transcends all limitations — the spiritual counterpart of the exodus from Egypt.

“THE RIGHTEOUS RESEMBLE THEIR CREATOR”¹⁸

As explained, G-d does not remain content with providing a Jew with the energy needed to observe the Torah and its *mitzvos* at the outset, but remains an active partner at the time the Jews observe the *mitzvos*, performing the same *mitzvos* as they perform. This pattern is also displayed by the righteous,

The person is thus punished “measure for measure.” He will not arise in the resurrection. This explanation also explains why a person who lends interest is not mentioned in *Perek Cheilek* (ch. 10) of *Sanhedrin* as one of those who does not have a portion in the World to Come. A person who lends with interest acts contrary to the motif of resurrection. Hence, he is included among the category of those who deny the resurrection which is mentioned there (*Sichos Shabbos Parshas Mishpatim*, 5723).

17. On this basis, we can understand our Sages’ statement (*Shmos Rabbah* 31:4) that a person who lends money without interest “is considered as if he fulfilled all the *mitzvos*.” For the fulfillment of the *mitzvah* against taking interest brings about the active participation of G-d in our Divine service — an element fundamental to our observance of all *mitzvos*.

18. *Bamidbar Rabbah* 10:5.

and in particular by the *Nesi'im* of the Jewish people, who help connect the nation to G-d.¹⁹ Not only do they empower their emissaries to carry out the missions with which they are charged, but they engage in the same tasks themselves.

This approach was especially apparent in the case of my revered father-in-law, the Rebbe. Not only did he send out emissaries and empower them to strengthen Jewish observance in general, and spread the wellsprings of *chassidus* in particular, he remained an active partner, dedicating himself to this work. And this applied not only in his earlier years, but in his later years, when he had disciples — and disciples of disciples — who were equipped to perform these tasks.

This serves as a lesson to all those who are bound to him, and who follow in his footsteps. They should not remain satisfied with the fact that they have raised students who are involved with spreading Torah and *Chassidus*. They should not excuse themselves by calculating that, since the work being carried out by their students is a result of their influence, they are entitled to the additional light generated by their students' efforts. If this is their attitude, they might feel that they need not continue to involve themselves with others, and will instead spend their time studying Torah themselves.

Receiving “profit” (additional spiritual light) for one's previous efforts in this way smacks of taking interest. Instead, a person must be ready to both work on himself and involve himself with others *continually*. He must himself perform the labor which he demands from his students.

The reward which we will receive from foregoing such “spiritual interest” will be that my revered father-in-law, the

19. See *Sefer HaSichos — Toras Shalom*, p. 158.

two separate entities come together — is not sufficient. Instead, one must study in a manner that resembles engraving; the student should cease to see himself as an independent entity; his entire existence is the Torah.

This approach was exemplified by Moshe our teacher, the first recipient of the Torah. His *bittul*, self-nullification, was so great that he identified totally with G-dliness, saying⁷ “I will grant grass...” The word “I” refers to G-d, and yet it was uttered by Moshe because “the Divine Presence spoke from his throat.”⁸

A similar process of self-transcendence was manifest by Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai. His individual existence was entirely subsumed; he was nothing more than an expression of G-dliness. For this reason, he could say:⁹ “I saw superior men and they are few... If there are two, they are my son and I. If there is one, it is I.”¹⁰ Praising himself in this way was not a departure from the humility that is natural for the righteous, because he had no self-concern whatsoever.

WALKING THE EXTRA MILE

As mentioned on several previous occasions,¹¹ every interpretation of a particular term or verse in the Torah is related to every other. Thus the interpretation of the Alter Rebbe, that Torah study must resemble “engraving,” shares a connection to the simple meaning of the term *bechukosai*, referring to *chukim*, implying that one must study the Torah with *kabbalas ol*. It's true that a Jew must also understand the Torah, but the basis of his understanding must be *kabbalas ol*.

7. *Devarim* 11:15. Note the interpretation of *Likkutei Torah*, *Vayikra* 50a.

8. See *Zohar*, Vol. III, pgs. 7a, 265a, 332a; *Shmos Rabbah* 3:15; *Vayikra Rabbah* 2:3; *Mechilta*, *Shmos* 18:19.

9. *Sukkah* 45b, *Sanhedrin* 97b.

10. *Bereishis Rabbah* 35:2.

11. See the *sichah* to *Parshas Toldos* in this series.

smaller than the part which speaks about *mitzvos* that can be grasped.

As such, the use of the term *bechukosai* in the opening verse of the Torah reading is problematic. Since the intent is that the Jews “labor in the study of Torah,” it would seem more appropriate to use another term. For as mentioned above, *chukim* represent a very small portion of the Torah.

AN INTEGRAL WHOLE

In *Likkutei Torah*, the Alter Rebbe interprets the term *bechukosai* as related to the word *chakikah*, meaning “engraved.” The implication is that we must labor in the study of Torah until the words are engraved within us.

The advantage of engraving over writing is not merely that engraved letters are united with the surface unto which they are carved, for this is also true with regard to written letters. Although letters written on parchment are not part of the parchment itself, they become united with the parchment.

Instead, the advantage of engraving is that the letters are not an independent entity. Their existence cannot be separated from the object onto which they have been engraved; the two form one integral whole.

This is the lesson the term *bechukosai* communicates with regard to the study of Torah. The intent is not merely that a Jew who studies the Torah should be united with the subject matter. The caution against studying Torah in a superficial matter, as Doeg the Edomite did,⁶ is a more elementary lesson. Instead, the intent of the phrase is to teach that a person must engrave the Torah he studies within his being. Studying in a manner which resembles writing — in which

6. [Though Doeg was a great scholar, his knowledge did not produce personal refinement] (*Sanhedrin* 106b).

Rebbe, will continue to invest himself in our efforts. And through him — for he “stands between G-d and yourselves”²⁰ — is drawn down G-d’s active participation, the acceptance of the yoke of heaven. This in turn will lead to an exodus from Egypt, a sundering of all the limitations which we face.

(Adapted from *Sichos Behar-Bechukosai*, 5710)



20. Cf. *Devarim* 5:5.

BECHUKOSAI

TO LABOR IN TORAH STUDY

On the phrase,¹ “If you proceed in My statutes,” the *Sifri* states (as quoted by *Rashi*):

Is the intent the performance of the *mitzvos*? The continuation [of the verse] “and are careful to keep My commandments” pertains to the *mitzvos*. What then is the intent of “If you proceed in My statutes”? That you labor in the study of Torah.

This requires explanation: If the intent of the phrase is that Jews should observe the *mitzvos*, we could understand why the term *bechukosai*, “in My statutes,” was used. Although there are three different types of *mitzvos* (*chukim*, *eidus*, and *mishpatim*), one could assume that the verse is referring to all three with the term *chukim* to imply that even the *eidus* and the *mishpatim*, which can be rationally understood, should be observed with the same commitment of *kabbalas ol*, acceptance of G-d’s yoke, as are the *chukim*.²

If it is postulated that the phrase is referring to the study of Torah, however, the term *bechukosai* presents a difficulty. Torah study involves comprehension and understanding. We must labor and review our studies, not only to know the laws,

1. *Vayikra* 26:3.

2. See the *sichah* to *Parshas Mishpatim* in this series, where this concept is explained.

but to understand their motivating principles as explained in both the Written and Oral Law.

Some *mitzvos* are placed in the category of *chukim* because their motivating principle transcends understanding. As *Rashi* states:³ “It is a decree... you have no permission to question [its observance].” These are, however, a distinct minority within the Torah. By and large, the Torah was given in a manner which can be comprehended by a mortal mind.

To cite a parallel: The Written Law is quantitatively far smaller than the Oral Law. Now the *mitzvah* to study the Written Law can be fulfilled by merely reading portions from it. For this reason, even an unlearned man who does not understand what he is reading is required to recite a blessing before studying Torah. With regard to the Oral Law, by contrast, the *fundamental element* is understanding. When a person does not understand the passage he is studying, he may not recite a blessing before studying.⁴

There is a radical difference between the Written Law and the Oral Law. The Written Law is a bounded text, with a specific number of verses and letters. There is no possibility for addition. The Oral Law, by contrast, is not restricted in size. It is true that at present only a certain number of laws have been revealed, but in every generation there are additions, as our Sages commented:⁵ “Every new insight developed by an experienced sage was given to Moshe on Mount Sinai.”

The same pattern is reflected within the Written Law itself. The part of the Written Law which transcends understanding and deals with *chukim* and the like is far

3. In his commentary to the beginning of *Parshas Chukas*.

4. *Shulchan Aruch HaRav, Hilchos Talmud Torah*, the conclusion of ch. 2; see also *Likkutei Torah, Vayikra*, the *maamar* entitled *Biur Lo Tashbis*.

5. See the *Jerusalem Talmud, Pe’ah* 2:4; *Shmos Rabbah* 47:1; *Vayikra Rabbah* 22:1; *Tanya, Kuntres Acharon*, the passage beginning *Lehavin Peratei*.