

Bechukotai

I once heard a most interesting observation from Rabbi Yaakov Kaminetsky Shlita, explaining the juxtaposition of the various Parshiyot in Behar and Bechukotai. Behar discusses the various laws of Shemittah. Bechukotai paints for us a glorious picture of the rewards to be granted if "You walk in My statutes, and keep My commandments, and do them."¹ The latter part of the Parsha vividly describes the grim catalogue of disasters, desolations and penalties which will overtake the people "if you will not hearken unto Me, and will not do all these commandments."²

The thrust of Reb Yakov's explanation is that only the *heter* of *V'asafta Deganncha*,³ only the permission granted to us by the dispensation in the Torah of "Thou mayest gather in thy corn" makes it possible for us to interrupt what otherwise should be steady and constant learning of Torah. If the necessity of earning a livelihood were to be removed, the commandment to meditate in the Torah day and night and to be "*Ameilim B'Torah*"—to toil in Torah would become a universal responsibility of every Jew. Under such circumstances *Limud Hatorah* would become the collective occupation of Klal Yisroel. It would constitute the fulfillment and actualization of the very ideal and the very goal for which we were established as a people.

Since Behar discusses *Shemittah*, the year in which agricultural activities must cease, those who work on the soil which in those days were the overwhelming majority of the people of Israel had no other option but to study the Torah. Bechukotai therefore begins its exhortation with "if you walk in My statutes" and as *Rashi* explains "if you toil in Torah", then, in a sense, you would fulfill the destiny of your people and indeed be a "kingdom of priests and a holy nation." The Parsha, however, continues to warn us that if under such favorable

conditions you will not utilize your free time and fail to live up to your great potential, you will have forfeited the abundant benefits that can come only to a Torah community and you will face the dire consequences that can come to a people that has rejected its noble treasure and failed to assume its national responsibilities as a people of G-d, as a people of Torah.

In a practical sense, there is a relevant message to all of us in contemporary society. People live longer, retire at a relatively early age and for younger people the work week is being constantly reduced. There is more than adequate time for leisure. While in the rest of the world this has caused more delinquency, more crime and other more negative manifestations, we can only hope that we, the Torah people, will utilize this extra free time creatively and constructively for more *Limud Torah* and more *Chizuk Hatorah*.

FOOTNOTES

1. Vayikra 26:3
2. Ibid. 26:14
3. Devorim 11:14