

DELUSIONS OF GRANDEUR

by Rabbi Aron Tendler

"Property is the basis for great wealth and social station. It lends support to the illusion of our own independence and importance."

This Shabbos we read Behar and BeChukosai, the final two Parshios of Leviticus. The juxtaposition of the various Parshios to each other and the specific Book in which they are found was intentional. I would like to discuss why Hashem placed Behar and BeChukosai as the final chapters of Sefer Vayikra.

Each of the five Books has a distinct focus. Sefer Bereishis focuses on the Creator having established distinct species within His universe that must be respected. Speciation is the law of nature and it is incumbent upon humanity to maintain and respect those distinctions.

Sefer Shemos focuses on the Creator's reason for speciation. The reason why we were separated from the rest of the nations and chosen to be the treasured nation of the Creator, was for the purpose of receiving the Torah.

Sefer Vayikra focuses on the ideal lifestyle that should be, if we embrace the purpose and intent of the Creator, as explained in the Torah. It outlines in terms of the service in the Bais Hamikdash, the ideal lifestyle of the Jew and the human as modeled by the Kohain and the Layvie.

Reflected and modeled in the laws governing the Kohain and the Layvie is our total dependency upon Hashem. Just as they depend upon the priestly gifts and tithes for their continued sustenance, so too, we depend upon Hashem's "gifts" for our continued survival. Just as they are to devote their lives to teaching Hashem's law and performing His service in the Bais Hamikdash, so too, we are supposed to devote ourselves to the study and performance of Hashem's Torah. Just as they model the ideal relationship between the Jew and his Creator, so too, we are to model the ideal relationship between the human and his Creator. In essence, the Kohain should be the ideal Jew and the Bais Hamikdash the ideal setting. So too, the Jew should be the ideal human and Eretz Yisroel the ideal country.

Our dependency upon Hashem was most evident during the years in the desert. Food, water, and shelter were the direct result of G-d's "dwelling within our midst". Our national experiences were to develop an everlasting trust in the constancy of Hashem's care and benevolence. It was to be the foundation upon which we could become a true "kingdom of priests and a holy nation". As we will

learn in Sefer Bamidbar, this proved to be far more challenging than expected. Translating ideals from expectation to reality requires a constant reassessment of those expectations. As we know, it took 38 more years for the Jews to accept their dependency upon Hashem than had been anticipated. Whereas they should have entered the Land at the end of the first two years in the desert, they ended up spending 40 years in the desert before entering the Land.

Sefer Vayikra was taught to the Bnai Yisroel during the second year in the desert. The anticipation was that they would soon enter the Land; and therefore, the expectations for our relationship with Hashem had to be clearly stated. This included a presentation of the changes and consequences that would occur as they left the miraculous environment of the cloud covered encampment and entered the natural setting of Eretz Yisroel. Upon entering the Land, the nation would have to adjust to a more normal lifestyle. No longer would food fall from heaven or water flow from rocks. No longer would the ever-present clouds protect them from the heat of day or the cold of night. Instead, the nation would have to plant fields and tend vineyards. They would have to build homes and chop wood. They would have to fortify their cities and protect their families. Yet, they would have to maintain a constant awareness of their dependency upon Hashem that was no less complete than the manifest dependency they had experienced while in the desert.

Upon entering the Land, the Bnai Yisroel would be faced with the conflict between Hashem's total control and the efforts demanded of them to live upon the land. When Hashem was giving them everything in the overt manner of the desert, they were forced to acknowledge, whether they liked it or not, that what they had was not as a result of their efforts. However, once they began to work the land, it was inevitable that they would begin to take credit for their accomplishments, even-though those accomplishments were because of Hashem's control.

Recognizing this inevitable conflict, Hashem presented a series of Mitzvos at the conclusion of Vayikra that addressed this concern. In the beginning of Behar we were commanded with Shemitah - the Sabbatical year, and Yovel - the Jubilee year. The Shemitah, every seventh year, reminded the people that, regardless of their efforts, the bounty of the land was Hashem's doing. The Yovel, every 50th year, reinforced the same; but added the dimension of property ownership. We attach great value and importance to "landed gentry". Property is the basis for great wealth and social station. It lends support to the illusions of our own independence and importance. Therefore, Hashem established the system of Yovel that returned all properties to their original familial divisions. It emphasized that all wealth, prosperity, and social station were due to His direct benevolence, and not our assumed efforts.

The Torah then focused on the institution of the Jewish slave. If due to unfortunate circumstances a "brother" sold himself or was sold, it could only be until the Shemitah or the Yovel. (even if the owner is non-Jewish) Few situations are as demeaning as slavery. Regardless of the circumstances, Hashem assured that each person would resume his rightful place as an equal in society. No one is permitted to "lord it" over a "brother" as if divinely ordained to be superior. Individual value and

station is the direct result of Hashem's benevolence and intervention.

BeChukosai began with a presentation of rewards and punishments. Our recognition of Hashem, as the source of our well-being and prosperity, demands that we follow His laws, or suffer the consequences. The mere fact that we can not do whatever we wish, especially in Eretz Yisroel, reinforces the totality of our dependency upon the Creator. Our expectations for individual and national longevity are the direct result of our relationship with Hashem; not the strength of our security or military preparation. Only if we keep the laws of Shemitah, Yovel, the return of properties, and freeing or redeeming Jewish slaves, will we be allowed to stay in Eretz Yisroel and enjoy the independence and freedom granted to us by Hashem.

Finally, the last set of laws in Sefer Vayikra deal with the true meaning of self worth and value. Our true worth is only a reflection of our relationship with Hashem. In the ideal world of Vayikra, individual value is the same for the great and the small, the recognized and the unnoticed. Therefore, the Torah preseted the monetary value of the individual who wishes to consecrate his personal worth to the Bais Hamikdash and Hashem. It doesn't make a difference how accomplished or important any one person might be. In the eyes of Hashem, all accomplishments and importance are His doing, not our own. Only the degree of our longing to be intimate with Hahsem and our adherence to His commandments is of relevance in assessing true individual worth. Any person who desires to devote himself to Hashem is equal to any other who might desire to devote himself to Hashem. Therefore, the prices are preset regardless of whom you might be.

Our two Parshios beautifully sum up the message of Vayikra this week. National prosperity, individual wealth, personal status, social station, national security and self worth are the direct result of Hashem's benevolence, caring and love.

"Everything is G-d's doing except for our relationship with Hashem." That is totally up to us.

Good Shabbos.

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