

**Behukotai - A Look at the Rewards for Keeping the Torah**  
**Rabbi Eliot Malomet May 28, 2022 27 Iyyar 5782**

אם-בהקתי תלכו ואת-מצותי תשמרו  
 ונעשיתם אתם:  
**ונתתי** גשמיכם בעתם  
 ונתנה הארץ יבולה ונשיג לכם ליש את-בציר  
 ועזן השדה ותן פרוי: ובציר ישיג את-גרע  
 ואכלתם לחמכם לשבע **ונתתי** שלום בארץ  
 וישבתם לבטח בארצכם: וישבתם ואין מתריד  
**והשבתי** חיה רעה מן-הארץ וירדפתם את-איביכם  
 ותרב לא-מעבר בארצכם: ונפלו לפניכם להרב:  
 וירדפו מכם חמשה מאה וירדפו מכם לפניכם להרב:  
**ופניתי** אליכם  
**והפריתי** אתכם **והקיימתי** את-בריתי אתכם:  
 ואכלתם יטון נוטון וישן מפני חדש תוציאוי:  
**ונתתי** משפני בתוככם ואל-תגעל נפשי אתכם:  
**והתהלכתי** בתוכם **והניתי** לכם לאלהים  
 ואתם תהיו-לי לעם:  
 א"י ה אלהיכם  
 אשר הוצאתי אתכם מארץ מצרים מהילת להם עבדים  
 ואשבר מטת עלכם ואלה אתכם קוממיות:

*There will be so much old grain that it will still be there when the new is harvested. you will have to clear out.*

**I will place my Dwelling in your midst, and I will not repel you.**

**I will walk with you in your midst, and I will be a God for you, and you yourselves will be a people for Me.**

*I the Lord am your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from your being serfs to them; I broke the bars of your yoke, enabling you to walk upright!\**

And so we have arrived at end of Vayikra. We expect a summary statement, a conclusion. And, like the vassal treaties of ancient Near Eastern peoples, here we have one listing the provisions and consequences of upholding the covenant or failing to do so. It begins: **אם-בהקתי תלכו If you walk in my statutes...** what follows here is a set of rewards. We note that the list of punishments located at the end of the chapter, is twice as long. **If we examine this text carefully, we can count ten specific instances of God speaking in the first-person verb form that ends with the suffix תי** Ten. Ten rewards. Interesting. Could this be an analog to the Ten Commandments? Perhaps. Could this be an analog to the Ten Teachings in the Book of Leviticus? (It's true. Like the Ten Commandments - עשרת הדברות- according to Jacob Milgrom, there are **ten torot עשרת התורות** in the Book of Leviticus. Coincidence or deliberate? You decide. Milgrom: *ten torot, comprising a decalogue of ritual life,' as follows: five torot of sacrifice- (1) the burnt offering; (2) the cereal offering; (3) the purification offering; (4) the reparation offering; and (5) the well-being offering - and five torot of impurity - (1) animals; (2) the parturient; (3) scale disease; (4) the purification of the scale diseased); and (5) genital discharges. These torot were documents probably stored in the sanctuary archives. They were the special lore of the priesthood. The word torot itself means rituals or instructions.*

Here then is the list of ten rewards or blessings:  
*If by my laws you walk, and my commands you keep, and observe them,*

*If by my laws you walk, and my commands you keep, and observe them,*

*then I will give-forth your rains in their set-time, so that the earth gives-forth its yield and the trees of the field give-forth their fruit.*

*Threshing will overtake vintage for you, and vintage will overtake sowing;*

*you shall eat your food to being-satisfied, and be settled in security in your land.*

**I will give peace** throughout the land, so that you will lie down with none to make you tremble,

**I will cause-to-cause** wild beasts from the land, and a sword shall not cross through your land.

*You shall pursue your enemies, and they will fall before you to the sword;*

*five of you will pursue a hundred, and a hundred of you, a myriad pursue, and your enemies will fall before you to the sword.*

**I will turn-my-face toward you, I will make-you-fruitful and I will make-you-many, and I will establish my covenant with you.**

*You will eat old-grain, the oldest-stored, and the old for the new.*

This Parasha Sheet is sponsored by Beth Spurr, Diane Kurucz, Linda Tondow and Rabbi Malomet, in honor of Linda Diamond's birthday.

**Happy Birthday Linda!**



1. **וְנָתַתִּי גֶשְׁמֵיכֶם בְּעֵתָם** - ***I will give you*** your rain in its season. The orderly movement of the seasons with its corresponding weather is truly one of the great blessings of life. At the very least it means that you can function in structures of time without having to worry. The results of ordered seasons of rain are abundant crops and produce.

2. **וְנָתַתִּי שְׁלוֹם בְּאָרְצְךָ** - ***I will give peace*** to the land. Arguably, an abundance of food without security is not a blessing at all (eg. Ukraine), neither is security without abundance (eg. Kenya). Survival and security go hand in hand.

3. **וְהִשְׁבַּתִּי תַיִה רְעָה מִיַּד-אֲרָצְךָ** - ***I will cause-to-cause*** wild beasts from the land. Security from enemies who want to kill you and destroy you is what we think of when we think of peace. But consider the other great fear that people in antiquity (and in some areas of the world today) must have had if they came across a wild animal. One of the great stories of the Bible hinges on this as the presumptive cause of death. When Jacob sees Joseph's torn coat drenched in blood he laments, **תַּיִה רְעָה אֲכָלְתָהּוּ טַרְף טַרְף יוֹסֵף**; - ***A wild beast has eaten him, torn, torn is Joseph!*** But it doesn't take much of an imagination to read **תַּיִה רְעָה** metaphorically (the Prayer for Peace that we recite every Shabbat has seared that into our minds). People behave as wild beasts wielding their terror indiscriminately. The recent mass shootings in the US and terror in Israel will suffice as illustrations of that.

4. **וּפְנִיתִי אֵלֶיכֶם** - ***I will turn-my-face*** toward you. Why would turning God's face be a blessing? Well, consider that the opposite, *hiding-my-face*, is the ultimate curse: abandonment. The threat of divine abandonment occurs at the end of the Torah in the final set of blessings and curses. *Turning toward* is an expression of divine love. This simply means, *I will be totally attentive to you and I will never abandon you.*

5. **וְהַפְרִיתִי אֶתְכֶם** - ***I will make you fruitful*** and 6. **וְהַרְבִּיתִי אֶתְכֶם** - ***I will make you many.*** And while admittedly, these two are a couplet, we are counting them as separate blessings because, as with all pairs, the paired elements can stand alone separately to yield a very basic reading: it's one thing to be fruitful, it's another thing to be many. To be *fruitful* is to have offspring. That's a blessing onto itself. To be *many* extends that blessing, augmenting it. And of course, the encoded blessing of this couplet of separate

singular blessings is the blessing God gives to humanity at the end of Creation **פְּרוּ וּרְבוּ** - *be fruitful and multiply.*

7. **וְהִקְמִיתִי אֶת-בְּרִיתִי אִתְּכֶם**: - ***and I will establish*** my covenant with you. Is it an accident that the seventh blessing would be the establishing of the covenant? I think not. And what does that mean anyway? That the covenant will be sustaining, enduring, everlasting, ironclad, unceasing, unending, eternal.

8. **וְנָתַתִּי מִשְׁכְּנִי בְּתוֹכְכֶם** - ***I will place*** my Dwelling in your midst. In the world view of the Kohanim (and let us not forget that we are completing Leviticus also known as *Torat Kohanim*) the entire life of the people radiates from the orderly functioning of the sanctuary. That is the heart of the people. The people encamp around it, but in the biblical imagination, God's concentrated presence, *the place where God's name resides*, radiates from there to the world. Israel's mission is to be the vessel of God's presence in the world. This blessing is the apotheosis of that mission.

9. **וְהִתְהַלַּכְתִּי בְּתוֹכְכֶם** - ***I will walk about*** in your midst. We can't help but hear the echoes of Bereishit here. With whom else does God walk? Well, God's *voice walks* in the Garden of Eden. So there is an allusion to an *edenesque* bliss here. But I would be inclined to consider that this is a reference to the relationship with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, with whom God also *walked*. And so, what God is envisioning here for Israel is a relationship as intimate as the one He had with the patriarchs, as a consequence of fulfilling His commandments

And finally, 10. **וְהָיִיתִי לָכֶם לֵאלֹהִים** - ***I will be a God*** for you, and you yourselves will be a people for me. The ultimate reward for fulfilling the commandments is the ultimate purpose of Israel's existence. The relationship with God. The irony is not lost on us: if Israel fulfills God's commandments, God gets to be God; if not, God doesn't get to be God. Thus, the ultimate reward for Israel is also the ultimate reward for God. God is totally dependent on Israel and, almost to the point of insecurity, so desperately vulnerable to being spurned by Israel. It's interesting to note that these rewards take us from the fulfillment of Israel's physical needs of food and security to the fulfillment of God's need for partnership. God and Israel are mutually dependent on each other. Shabbat Shalom!



This Parasha Sheet is sponsored by Beth Spurr, Diane Kurucz, Linda Tondow and Rabbi Malomet, in honor of Linda Diamond's birthday.

**Happy Birthday Linda!**

