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Many people have asked, what it is that makes our religion unique? Wherein do we differ from other religions? After all, almost all modern religions speak about loving your neighbor, doing good, being moral, raising a family, etc. This is true. However, what distinguishes a religion or culture from another is how it balances the various competing forces in life, how it prioritizes competing positive values. You can tell what a person's true value system is when he comes to ~~a~~<sup>a</sup> crossroads in life and must choose not between good and evil but between two competing positive values. What are his priorities? Does he decide to send his children to college or invest his money for his retirement? Does he take his aged parent into his home or does he accept an assignment in another city which would be good for his career but would force his parent into a nursing home?

What distinguishes the Jewish religion is the priority of its value system which differs greatly from other value systems. For example, traditionally great emphasis was placed on education. In Eastern Europe it was not unheard of for a family to spend 50% of their income to insure that their children received a Jewish education. If a person came to choose between hiring a teacher or buying a pair of shoes, the teacher would come first. If the choice was either to study or miss several meals, the choice was to study. There was, also, a great emphasis on family, what you were expected and required to do for your family. Judaism's priority system is what makes it unique.

We believe that when G-d intervened in history on Mount Sinai He gave us a point of balance for these competing positive forces which we maintain to this very day. He prioritized our values. This is what we mean when we say the Torah has never changed. The law never changes but obviously circumstances do. Sometimes, in order to maintain the same balance, we do exactly the opposite thing we did before. For example, the Torah commands us to guard

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our health. This means that in the summer we must do the exact opposite of what we do in the winter. In the winter we must put on a coat when we go outdoors while in the summer we must take it off. The Torah has not changed one bit but circumstances have. A vivid illustration of this was brought home to me several years ago when an individual approached me with a question. He asked me, "Is it permissible to stick little babies with pins?" I looked at him with anger and was ready to throw him out. I said, "What, are you a sadist? In Judaism you are not allowed to make a wound. You are not allowed to torture people. Do you realize the psychological damage as well as the physical damage you could do to the baby? Aside from the damage you would do to the baby, look at the terrible damage you would be doing to your own soul. What are you? Some kind of a nut?" He looked at me crushed and said, "But, Rabbi, I am a doctor". He wanted to know if he could give babies shots. "Oh", I said, "that's different". Actually though, when you give a baby a shot you are sticking it with a pin but it is for its benefit. It is to prevent diseases, etc. Obviously the law did not change but the circumstances did. The Jewish religion clearly dictates that to preserve a baby's health and prevent disease we are allowed to give shots.

In order to tell how Judaism prioritizes the various competing positive values in life, requires a great deal of study. That's why the study of Torah is so important. When people try to change Judaism, they do not want to allow Judaism to preserve its own point of balance between competing values but they want it to adopt another culture or religion's priority system. They want to change Judaism and make it into something it is not. For example, those who would downgrade the family and accept alternative life-styles completely destroy Judaism's priority system. Those who downgrade Jewish learning and are not interested in supporting what they want to do

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with Jewish sources and opinions obviously have already prejudged any issue they are discussing by adopting another culture's priority system and discounting Judaism's entirely. The Torah does not change. Circumstances, though, sometimes do change and in order to maintain our same position we may do opposite things. In fact, this distinction between the law and the facts is recognized in the court systems of America where we have juries who determine the facts and judges who then determine the law based on the facts. If the facts change, then a different law applies. The law does not change but which law applies depends on the facts. In Jewish life throughout the ages most of the arguments have been on interpreting the facts, not on what is the law.

One of the ways Judaism differs from other religions is that Judaism is not just concerned with the individual. Judaism is very much concerned about building a community. We believe that the way you organize a community has a great deal of bearing upon how people live and act. We have a responsibility not only to ourselves and to G-d but, also, to our community. This can be seen even in our American system. What distinguishes the United States from, for example, Mexico? The people in Mexico are obviously as smart and as virtuous and as dedicated and as committed as the people in the United States, but we, here in the United States, have had much greater success in allowing each individual to fulfill <sup>his</sup> ~~their~~ potential than <sup>in</sup> Mexico. Why is this? It is because of the way we are organized, the way our community is set up. It is because of our form of government, because of our having originally distributed the land, the Homestead Act, etc. America is strong and prosperous, ~~and~~ not primarily because Americans are ambitious and hard working, but because <sup>of</sup> the way the community is set up. ~~Our priorities have allowed us to accomplish what we have accomplished.~~

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Judaism, too, is interested in community. We believe that it is only by attaching yourself to the community, by working within the community that an individual can fulfill himself. We, also, believe that the community has a responsibility to the individual to make sure that he has the wherewithal to develop himself. Concentrations of wealth are to be abhorred. One class of people should not control all the resources and, thereby, reduce the rest of the population to serfdom. This not only makes them poor but, also, prevents them from choosing to serve G-d. Limiting a person's freedom stops a person from having the capacity to serve G-d. Economic slavery is as bad as physical slavery.

These ideas are found in the Torah portion, Behar. We learn that G-d decreed the laws of the Sabbatical year and the Jubilee year on Mount Sinai just as He did the laws of personal morality. Judaism seeks to balance the competing forces of good within <sup>a society/ JUST AS IT DOES WITHIN</sup> an individual. Judaism has a priority system in community as well as in individual ethics. Judaism says we are individuals within a group. The individual has responsibilities to the group and the group has responsibilities to the individual. The traditional form of davening expresses this relationship beautifully.

Each individual at a Minyon prays by himself just pausing to wait for the Cantor to say the last lines of each prayer. However, certain prayers cannot be said without a Minyon and praying together with others who are praying is a totally different experience than praying alone and much more meaningful and uplifting. Certain individuals at certain times have responsibilities to the Minyon and the Minyon has responsibilities to them to let them lead the prayer, etc. The group does not dominate the individual but, at the same time, the individual contributes to the group. This balancing of the relationship between the group and the individual is one of Judaism's most unique features. In all areas of life Judaism has this

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unique balance.

Soon we are to celebrate Israel's Independence Day. Israel gives Jews throughout the world the unique opportunity to demonstrate to the world Jewish values on a community level which is impossible <sup>in</sup> any other place in the world. We already know of the many positive contributions that Israel has made ~~already~~ in the areas of agriculture, science, child care programs, community living, Torah scholarship, etc. This is only the beginning. It is our belief that Israel must continue to flourish and grow because the world needs the messages that will come from it. It will serve as a beacon to the whole world because it will show the world the uniqueness of our religion, and based on Israel's experience the whole world will benefit. May Israel continue to grow and flourish and may we soon see it at total peace with all its neighbors.

In the Torah portion Behar we learn how society may be just even though things may look good on the surface if things below are rotten the whole society will collapse. This holds true throughout life. Unfortunately, there are many people who just like to put on a good show. They constantly stress surface things. This reminds me of the story of the businessman named Goldschmidt who could not find time to take a vacation. Finally his wife prevailed upon him to go to Florida. Unfortunately, at the end of two weeks he dropped dead. They brought his body back to New York. His family did not observe the Jewish rules of not viewing the body. In Houston most of our rules of mourning are observed primarily, I believe, because Levy's Funeral Home is located in a far neighbor. We are not bothered by the problem of viewing and all the bodies buried in our cemeteries are washed and buried in Tachreecheem thanks to the good work of Chevra Kadisha headed by Julius Chapman. In any event, the body was placed for viewing and some of the business partners passed the body and commented how tanned and healthy the man looked to which his wife replied, "He should. The two weeks in Florida did him a world of good". This, of course, stressed how many people just base all their opinions on surface impressions. This, many times, does grave injustice. Not all Jews in Houston are rich and just ask Henry Spira of the Gemillos Chesed Society how many free loans are needed. One of the major reasons why corporations want college graduates is not because of the skills they learn in college but because they speak a similar language. They are able to communicate much easier. They do not have so many hassles, but it is really only a surface thing. In Judaism we are taught not to rely on surface impressions. In this Torah portion we are taught that you should not take from him interest and you should fear the Lord your G-d and your brothers should live with you. You are not supposed to charge interest to those who need a loan for the basic necessities of life. We are not talking about business investments. It is strange, though, that here it uses the expression and you shall fear the Lord. Usually this expression is used when

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only the individual himself can tell whether he is doing the right thing. For example, only you know whether or not you are giving good advice. I once had a friend who was a stockbroker and when another one of my friends came to him he gave him the worst possible advice. He was mad at him about a girlfriend or something. It turned out that the stock market acted according to his advice and in two months my friend was a millionaire and he gave my stockbroker friend a Cadillac. My stockbroker friend felt so guilty he had to come and pour his heart out to me. In this case, though, the expression and you should fear the Lord your G-d does not fit in because we can tell whether or not the person has charged interest. The meaning here, the Rabbis say, is you should not even use the fear of G-d to fool people. That, too, is a terrible sin. Once in New York we found a caterer who was cheating on the kosher laws. When we confronted the Rabbi who was in charge of the mashgiachs he said how is this possible. The caterer davens with a Gartel. Surface impressions were false. There are many people in the world who all they crave is publicity and honor and they are only concerned with surface things. One of the big differences between Israel and the United States up till now has been that in Israel they are concerned with the real thing rather than appearances. The fruits may not look as nice as the fruits here but they taste a lot better. The hospitals may not look the way we expect a hospital to look but people live longer in Israel with all the terrorism than in the United States. Today we are honoring a couple who shun publicity, who have done so many good things that nobody knows about. They are real people. It is not the surface that counts. It is what is beneath it. Substance is always more important than appearances.

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the suits and clothes and houses they need and the poor, like in South America, would grow poorer and society would collapse. We need each other. Parents need children and children need parents and we should teach them that we need each other more than we need things. The story about the Roman father who took his son to the Colliseum. There some people were being thrown to the lions. The little boy started to cry. The father said, "Why are you crying? These people are enemies of the State." The little boy said, "I know, Daddy". "Then why are you crying?" said the father. "Because the little lion in the corner is not getting any." Unfortunately, that's the way many people feel today. They just want to get theirs. This attitude can only lead to destruction. We all need each other and only when we all work with each other can we gain material prosperity. The symbol of Judaism is a Covenant, a treaty. We need G-d and even in some ways G-d needs us and we certainly need each other.

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Everyone knows that the 7th day is Shabbos. We all speak about Shabbos and its obligations and duties and many people think that Shabbos, itself, means the 7th day, but the word "Shabbos" in Hebrew refers not only to the 7th day of the week. In the Torah Shabbos also refers to holidays and in the Torah portion Behar it also refers to the sabbatical year. In the 7th year there should be a Shabbos for the land, a Shabbos for G-d. We also learn that the Jubilee Year, or Yovel year, is also referred to as a Shabbos. The word "Shabbos" in Hebrew means "to cease", "to desist", and "to rest". The word Shabbos does not just refer to the 7th day. The Rabbis teach us that if we look at the four things Shabbos refers to we can understand the needs of the human soul. On the Sabbath, the 7th day of the week, we say "Shofas Vayeeno Nofash" "and he rested", and it is commonly explained "he was refreshed", but the word "Vayeeno" comes from the soul. Shabbos is what we need in order to have a rich inner life. Life only has meaning and depth when we have a rich inner life. The Shabbos, the 7th day, stands for one of the concepts that we must have if we are to have a meaningful life, if we are to have an enriched and integrated life. Shabbos teaches all of us that everyone has worth just because he is and not because he creates or does things. So often in America today the view is that you are only what you do, that if for some reason you cannot produce you are no good. Of course, we believe people should work and produce things, but that is not the essence of their being. They are important just because G-d created them. So often today people feel they only have worth if they have accomplished certain things, and if not they are failures. I remember when I was a Hillel Director, that the students who came to me contemplating suicide were not the "C" students afraid of getting an "F", but the "A" students afraid they would get a "B". They just could not take the fact that they were not "A" students, and although most of them never attempted suicide, they had deep psychological problems and some ended up under psychiatric care. It is not important whether you have achieved all your goals or are elected president of this or that, but just that you gave it your best. Each of us have self-worth and Shabbos teaches us that. Every Jew is a king or queen on Shabbos even though on

Shabbos we do not produce anything. The Shabbos is used in conjunction with the holidays of Pesach, Succos, and Shavuos, and teaches us the importance of community. The holidays come at particular times of the year. We can overcome the cold and the heat and all of nature's vicissitudes if we have people to help us. The holidays also stand for history. We can overcome slavery and exile and wanderings if we have a community, if we help each other. Our inner life needs the support of family and friends and community. The Shabbos that we talk about in this Torah portion, Behar, is concerned with space. We each need a space that we know is ours to which we belong. One of the problems that we Jewish people had during the exile was that we had no space. This led to great insecurity and, although we were able to survive because we knew G-d needed us and wanted us and we had a community, it was difficult. Our space was our books, but today with the founding of the State of Israel each Jew breathes easier because we know we have our own space and Jews in this country are much more aggressive politically because we know we have a space. Everybody has to feel they have a place, a place in a family and a place somewhere on earth. Finally, the Shabbos of the Jubilee, of the Yovel, stands for freedom, that we are free, that our fate is not sealed by the gods, that we can make meaningful choices, that we have the power to do good and we know we can do good. That's why at the end of this Torah portion it says "Es Shabbos Sosai Tishmoru Umigdoshi Tiro" "My Sabbath you should observe and My holy things you should revere." If a person has these qualities of Shabbos, if he knows he has self-worth just because he is, if he has a community and has a place and knows that he is free, then he can accomplish great things as long as he realizes that this world is a holy place and we are supposed to be G-d's partners in creation. I am reminded of a story they tell about a fellow who went out to the golf course and there he came across a difficult hole and he was thinking to put his new ball down, but then he saw there was a lake and he decided to put down his old ball when, all of a sudden, he heard a voice shout out to him, "Use the new ball." He took out the new ball and put it down when all of a sudden he heard a voice call out, "Take a practice swing." He then

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took a practice swing. Feeling confident he stepped up to the tee only to hear the voice boom out, "Use the old ball." In our scheme of things it does not make any difference whether you use the old ball or new ball. It is up to us and whether we knock it into the lake or not does not matter. We each have great self-worth.

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In the Torah portion Behar we learn about the Sabbatical year. The Sabbatical year is referred to as Shabbos. Actually, in the Torah the word "Shabbos" is used to describe four different occurrences. It, of course, describes the weekly Shabbos, which commemorates the creation of the world. It refers to all Jewish holidays as Shabbos. Also, in the Torah the Sabbatical year is referred to as Shabbos as is the Jubilee year, the Yovel. The characteristic of all these Shabbatot is that they are holy. We all know about Shabbos Kodesh, the holiness of the Shabbos. We all know, too, about the holidays, which are called Micra Kodesh, the convocations of holiness. Of course, we learn about the Jubilee year in this week's Torah portion. "V'Kee Dashtem Mishnassa HaMeesheem Shonoh - And you shall sanctify the 50th year." The characteristics of all these four institutions is holiness. In fact, there is another institution which is called holiness in Hebrew and that is marriage. Marriage is known as Kedushim. What exactly does it mean, though, when we talk about holiness? What does holiness mean?

First of all, of course, we know holiness means to be separate, to be distinct. The Jewish people are considered to be a holy people because we are separate, unique, and distinct. It does not mean we are better than other peoples, but we have been given a special mission from G-d to be His partners in spreading His moral teachings throughout the world. Although many Jews are not worthy of this task, and many Jews do not even want this task, the rest of the nations of the world know we have this task. That is how Hitler, when he set about destroying us, justified what he was doing by saying, "The Jewish people gave the world a conscience, and we do not need a conscience." So, holiness means to be separate.

That is the same context it has in marriage as well, that the couple are now separate from each other. They now are separate from everyone else. They must now be devoted to each other, that they cannot now go out on dates with other people, that they are separate, that they are now to be dedicated and devoted to each other. That is what it means when it says, "Haray Admed Kedeshes Lee - Behold you are sanctified to me," which means that from now on you cannot have other boyfriends. You cannot seek other husbands. You are devoted to me, and, of course, the man is also devoted to his wife. So, the first connotation is to be separate.

The second connotation of the word "Kodesh" means that you give up part of your independence in the sense that you no longer can do anything you want to do. You are limited now. That is, of course, what the weekly Shabbos means. You cannot do anything you want with your time. You must now devote that day to study and meditation. You are no longer man the creator but man the appreciator. You have to spend time with you family and enjoy them and don't go out to do business, etc. The same thing is true with the Sabbatical year. You are limited as to your ownership of land. You are not the complete master of the land. You must give up some of your rights. Every seventh year you cannot sow, plant, harvest, etc. The same thing applies to the holidays. The holidays speak about the relationships we have with each other. We are not free to do anything we want with other people. We have to establish loving and caring relationships. The same idea is with the Jubilee year, is that we are not free to engage labor any way we want. We have to treat our workers correctly and properly and make sure they have dignity, etc. So, the connotation of holy means to be separate, that we have to be devoted and set aside from others as a bride and groom are set aside and

separated from others in their own relationship, and also it means that you are giving up part of your "Bilus", part of your mastery, part of your independence, that you are limited. This, of course, is the negative connotation of getting married.

Of course, there are positive connotations and these positive connotations come from the second part of the marriage ceremony which is called "Nasueem". The first part of the marriage ceremony is called "Kedusim". Of course, the couple stands under a chupa, and they do not stand as individuals but with their family to show, too, that when they get married they are not divorcing themselves from their family. That's why in Judaism we want the couple to be married in a community. You need a minyan in order to say the blessings of Nesueem, the blessings of marriage. You are not cutting yourself off from your family. It is true that from now on your mate must be number one in your life. No longer are your parents number one, but your mate must be number one. Of course, we all know about the in-law stories, most of which are not true, but they speak about this tension that is there, because all priorities have to be rearranged. When you take a mate, what you are doing is not just adding another loyalty to your relationships; you are changing all the loyalties completely. Your parents are now number three or four. Your mate is, of course, number one. You will have children, and they will be number one or two, etc., but your parents are still number three or four. You are not to cut yourselves off from them. We do not believe you make a successful marriage by cutting yourself off from your family, but marriage not only has the negative connotations of being limited and of being separate, but it also has positive connotations.

That is, of course, what the word "Nesuee" means. It means "to be lifted up". The word "Naso" means "to lift up", "to carry", "to endure", "to marry", and also it means "to forgive", that each of you when you get married usually marry someone who is an emotional opposite, that your mate makes up for your own emotional deficiencies. Of course, this sometimes can lead to trouble, because sometimes very tactful people marry very frank people, and although it is probably that frankness which attracted the tactful person to the frank person, sometimes in public the frank person's comments may cause the tactful person to become very upset, especially if it is at an important business or social occasion, that many times the very qualities which attract also cause disagreement. That is, of course, why the couple have to understand each other. They have to understand that when they are married they are actually becoming more than themselves. It uplifts them. It also allows them to endure the vicissitudes of life, to overcome the inevitable problems of life. They must be willing to carry each other, to help each other, especially over the rough spots of life. And, of course, they must be willing also to forgive each other. Because of the inevitable problems that their different emotional natures have there will be occasions, an important business or social party, where they have to realize that these are the exact traits that drew them to each other that causes the problems now.

We also know that in marriage it is this idea that really you are better together than singularly apart that makes marriage unique and special. Marriage is not just a business arrangement. In fact, if marriage is based on a business arrangement, then, of course, it will probably fail. In the Torah portion Bechukosai we learn how when a person gave an

offering to the Temple and he said, "I am going to give my value to the Temple," there were two different ways he could do it. He could say, "Arkeeolai", which means "My value is upon me," or he could say, "Domeeolai", which roughly translates, "My value upon me", too, but, of course, it refers to something else because "Domee" really means "my price is upon me". When you are talking about Domee - price this really answers the question of, "What do you do for a living?" What can you gain if you are a lawyer or an architect, for example, in a slave market, how much would people be willing to pay for your services? When we say Arkeeolai it refers to your value. Who are you? And when we refer to your value everyone's value is the same basically. Everyone's value is the same in certain categories, but when it comes to your price, then, of course, everyone's price differs, and price refers to something outside of you, what you can do, not who you are. In Judaism, of course, values are more important. It is not important to have a fancy house, cars, etc. It is more important that you share common values together, that you are willing to work for the same goals and aspirations. Therefore, a marriage must have Arkee - values. Values must be the center of marriage, and that will allow you then to overcome and endure and carry each other and make your marriage an uplifting experience.

I am reminded of the story about a man who proposed to a woman. The woman asked, "How much money do you have?" The man said he had \$500. The woman said, "I won't marry anyone unless they have \$100,000." So the man left for the big city and was away for five years. When he came back home he looked up the woman again and said, "Well, will you marry me now?" She asked, "How much money do you have?" He replied, "Well, I worked real, real hard but all I was able to accumulate was another \$500.

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All I have is \$1,000." She looked at him and said, "Well, that's close enough. Let's get married." Marriage is not just a financial arrangement. It is something which fulfills an emotional need. It is also based upon holiness. It is also based on devotion and care which is based upon an exclusive relationship that the man and wife have with each other which is unique and special, which means the husband and wife are willing to give up some of their Bailus, that they are willing to give up some of their freedom and mastery of things in order to compromise and live together. A marriage is also supposed to be an uplifting experience which adds positively to a person's life, which makes the person married a better person than if he had remained single. It is our hope and prayer that the young people who are getting married shortly will have this type of marriage. Amen.

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I am very happy to be here at the National Museum of American Jewish History in Philadelphia, and, of course, to the synagogue Mikvah Israel which is housed in this museum. It is indeed a great honor to speak from the pulpit in which such great distinguished rabbis as Isaac Leifisir and Sabato Morias preached from. This is a very historical setting, because this congregation which was founded in 1740 had much to do with the forming of the American Jewish experience. I know my father is an amateur historian and since my very earliest days he has always filled our house with such names as the Franks and the Bushes and the Michaelsons and the Levis and Nonas and Russell, etc. Of course, not to forget Chaim Solomon who helped finance the American Revolution. We all know that just two blocks down the street is the hall in which the Constitution of the United States was adopted, and after it was adopted the story is told that the rabbi of Mikvah Israel and the leading minister walked arm and arm leading the parade which celebrated the writing of the Constitution. Just a few months ago this same act was re-enacted where the rabbi of Mikvah Israel and a leading clergyman led the parade that celebrated the 200th anniversary of the American Constitution.

The Torah portion which we read this Shabbos is particularly relevant because in this Torah portion we have the famous line, "And you shall sanctify the 50th year and you shall proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants." This line is inscribed on the Liberty Bell which is found just a few blocks away in Constitution Hall. The history of the Jewish community of America is intimately connected with the history of America, itself. In fact, Washington's aide de camp was David Salisbury Franks, who was also a colonel. He was a man who contributed much to George Washington's view of the Jewish people. Washington sent the famous letter to Congregation Mikvah Israel in which he affirmed that all citizens, no matter what their religion, could take an equal part in the public life

in America. And so it was that the United States was the first country in the whole world to grant the Jewish people civil rights. Many people think it was some country in Europe or maybe England, but it was not. America was the first country in the whole world which granted our people civil rights. We were excluded from public life for many hundreds of years. Our contributions were shunned. From the time of the first Crusade in 1099 until actually 1789 the Jewish people were excluded from all public life. Jewish contributions were masked. When they were presented to the general public, the Jewish authors were given Latin names so as not to appear that Jews could make any positive contributions. In fact, most of the instruments and maps that Colubus used to sail across the Atlantic were actually invented by Jews. Jews continued to make positive contributions but in a very low key way. It was not until 1789 when our Constitution was adopted that the Jews were formally recognized as being a part of the American experience. Even after that it was not universal because many states still banned Jews from voting. Even in Pennsylvania it was not until the 1830's that the Jews had full voting rights in state elections. But this country of ours, America, afforded the Jew the great opportunity to be a full participant in the public life. Of course, our contributions to the arts and sciences and especially to medicine is so overwhelming that the world has been greatly enriched because of our contributions. Think of what medicine would be without the Jewish contribution. Most of the diseases that we know today would still not be conquered. Lives would be shortened without our contributions especially in this particular field.

In this Torah portion, too, we learn about the Jubilee Year. In the Torah the word Shabbos has four distinct meanings. The word Shabbos can refer to the seventh day of creation, which we know is the Shabbat and which

we celebrate every week. Shabbat can also refer to the Jewish holidays, Pesach, Shavuot, Sukkot. They are also referred to as Shabbat, and Yom Kippur is referred to as Shabbat Shabbaton, the Sabbath of Sabbaths, just as the weekly Sabbath is also known as Shabbat Shabbaton. The Sabbatical Year in the Torah is also known as Shabbat. The Sabbatical Year, which we learn about in this Torah portion, where you had to leave the fields fallow and remit all debts. Of course, university professors throughout the world thank the Torah profusely for introducing the sabbatical. Then we have the fourth meaning, which refers to the Jubilee Year. The Jubilee Year is also called the Shabbat. Why do we have four meanings for the word Shabbat? We know that the United States is founded on the principles of freedom and equality, but if we really analyze the concepts of freedom and equality we will see that they are really mutually exclusive. If you have complete equality, then you really cannot have freedom. Some of the early kibbutzin stressed equality to the nth degree. They stressed it so much that it became completely absurd. In fact, when a person used to turn in his shirt to be laundered he would be given the first shirt that came in the pile, whether he was six feet or five feet. Everyone was equal, so, therefore, everyone got the first shirt that came out of the laundry. It was not even your shirt.

On the other hand, freedom carried to the extreme can also be completely absurd and can be completely destructive. We know that when we talk about freedom it does not mean that we can do anything that we want to do. Unfortunately, this is the way many people describe freedom today, that freedom is the ability to do anything you want to do without any restraints. We know today

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the tragic consequence of this type of freedom, where young boys roving in packs feels that if they want to do something, they do it and they call it wilding. If they want to rape young women or beat them up or vandalize stores, what difference does it make? That is what they feel like doing. I remember when I was a member of the ministerial commission, I was appointed to a committee to visit the jails. I visited teenagers. One day I visited a 14 year old boy who viciously attacked an 80 year old woman. I asked him why he did it and he said he felt like it. I looked at him and asked if he did everything he felt like doing. He said, "Rabbi, I am surprised at you. You wouldn't want me to become neurotic would you?" In other words, there is some sort of false notion based on some misreading of psychology that if people do not do what they feel like doing they will become neurotic. How could it be more neurotic than to attack an 80 year old woman?

This is the idea of freedom in America today, to roam free and not have any responsibilities, to do what you feel like doing. Whatever you feel like doing is good. I am afraid that this is embedded in one of the concepts of America that we cannot agree with. We agree with life and liberty. It is the pursuit of happiness that gives us a lot of trouble. The only thing you get when you pursue happiness is you get tired. Happiness cannot be achieved directly. Happiness is a by-product of other things. To my mind, a person can only become happy if he does three things simultaneously. One is that he sets himself a goal that he tries to achieve. America does recognize this type of happiness. The other type of happiness is that you know that you loved for yourself. G-d loves you, your

family loves you, your wife loves you, your children love you. The third thing that brings happiness is that you know that you can bring happiness to others. You can bring a smile to their lips. There is nothing more wonderful than after having not seen a nephew or niece or grandchild for a while, they run to you and say, "Poppy, Poppy." They are so happy to see you. That brings you such a warm feeling when you know that you are needed and wanted and can bring love and happiness to others. This is a great source of happiness, but you need all these three things together. You need to be able to set self-set goals, to know that you are loved for yourself, and to know that you can bring happiness to others. This is what brings happiness. Happiness cannot be induced by drugs or alcohol. The rabbis say that the difference between real happiness and fake happiness is the difference between oh and ah. Therefore, we would say that the Constitution should really read in America, life, liberty and the pursuit of mitzvahs. It is the pursuit of mitzvahs which really brings happiness to your life. In fact, the rabbis say that what happens when you do a mitzvah, you start out saying, oh, oh, oh, but in the morning you say, ah, it is wonderful. Sometimes when you do something that is beneath you you start out by saying ah, it is nice, but the next morning you say, oh, oh. In order to have real happiness you sometimes have to start with oh, but we always have to end with ah. Unfortunately, in America today there are many people who do not realize that. They think that freedom means you can do anything you want, but we do not say that. We say that in order to have freedom you also have to have kedusha, holiness. That's why it says you should sanctify the 50th year because it is talking about freedom. To

proclaim freedom throughout the land, freedom must be accompanied with holiness, with doing mitzvahs, which means that you know that G-d counts on you and you can be counted on. You can fill the emptiness of your own self. What is the opposite of kedusha in Judaism? The opposite of kedusha is Chalal, which means "space", empty space. Many times when a person feels empty inside he has to fill it with violence and all sort of other things because he does not have the inner satisfaction of knowing that he is loved for himself, that he can bring joy to others, that he can achieve self-set goals.

In America today we have to balance freedom with equality. We have to hold both these concepts in our mind in order for the American democracy to work. We have to have freedom and equality in our minds simultaneously. That is why, too, we have these four concepts of Shabbos. We deserve respect just because we are, not because we have to produce. On Shabbos we produce nothing. We just enjoy what we have produced before. This means that G-d loves us and cares for us and we are entitled to respect and dignity just because we exist. We have the concept of yontif, the holidays, which is different. That means that we are partners with G-d in creation, that we and G-d together determine when the holidays occur. Shabbos occurs every seventh day regardless of what we do, but the holidays occur only when we agree to have them occur. That is why we can manipulate the calendar so Yom Kippur never comes on a Friday or a Sunday. We are junior partners with G-d in creation. We have to produce and make this world a better place. The concept of the Sabbatical year means rachmones. A Jew has to have rachmones. We

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cannot look down on people who fail to produce because many people fail not through any fault of their own. You could have a terrible drought and have no crops. You have to have rachmones. We have to hold in our minds that we are unique and special and that we should also be G-d's partner in creation, but we are worthy of respect even if we do not produce. These concepts have to be held in our minds just like we have to hold in our minds the concept of freedom and equality at the same time in order to make America work. Finally, we have the concept of freedom. That is what the Jubilee Year stands for, for freedom, for proclaiming freedom throughout the land, but it has to be a liberty that is held in conjunction with kedusha. We have to fill our life with mitzvahs. That is what makes our freedom meaningful. In Jewish life we have to realize that we can contribute but that we are unique and special, that we are unique and special and have a right to exist. That is what Shabbos teaches us: that we are unique and special and we have a right to exist but we also have to contribute to the world, too, and that is what the holidays teach us. That, of course, is why we are so proud of what Mikvah Israel taught the Jewish community and what is found throughout this Jewish museum, that Mikvah Israel taught the Jewish community that we can be unique and special and still contribute to the world around us. Unfortunately, there are many Jewish groups who felt that in order to contribute to the world around us, in order to make a lasting impression in America, we had to give up our Jewish uniqueness. Mikvah Israel has preserved the Jewish rituals the way they have always been. We say we do not have to surrender our uniqueness, our specialness, in order to contribute. We have Shabbos as well as the holidays. Other groups who say we

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have to be only unique and segregate in some ghetto and not contribute to the world, use our uniqueness. Mikvah Israel has showed the way for the Jewish people to exist in America, and that is to retain its uniqueness but, yet, to contribute mightily to the United States but without sacrificing our uniqueness. We have to hold two concepts in our mind just to make democracy work: freedom and equality. In order to make Judaism work in America we have to hold two concepts together in our minds simultaneously the concept of our uniqueness, our specialness, our Shabbos, and also our responsibility to contribute to the general population.

May we continue to do so, and may we continue to learn from this example of Mikvah Israel and everything that we see in this museum so that Judaism will thrive in America and will continue to make the great contributions that we have made. We are a small people, only 50 million people in the whole world, but we can continue to make wonderful contributions as long as we safeguard our uniqueness while contributing to the world. May we continue to do so by following the example of Mikvah Israel. Amen.

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Today we read two Torah portion, Behar and Bechukosai. In the Torah portion Behar we learned about the laws of the sabbatical year, we learned about other rules of commerce, we learned about the jubilee year, we learned about taking interest, etc. In the first sentence in the Torah portion Behar it says, "And G-d spoke to Moshe on Mount Sinai saying..." The question can be asked, why all of a sudden are we talking about Mount Sinai? Mount Sinai happened many years before. Why all of a sudden did it stress Mount Sinai? And why is it that we learn the laws of business, basically, the laws of commerce right next to the Torah portion which deals with the curses and the blessings that will come upon the Jewish people if they observe the Torah? That is what the Torah portion Bechukosai is all about, these blessings and curses. The blessings are very few and the curses are many. The reason for it is that we all know what blessings are, but curses can come in many different forms.

In the blessings we learn that basically there are four blessings: peace, prosperity, and then it says, "And I will give My sanctuary in your midst and My soul will not be disgusted with you, and I will walk in your midst, and I will be for you as a G-d and you will be for Me as a people." The third blessing is that everyone will feel that they are important, that G-d loves them and cares for them, that they will realize that their life has meaning. That is a great blessing. It many times happens that there is peace and prosperity, but people are disgusted with themselves. They do not feel that life has any meaning, or they get involved in all sorts of terrible things like drugs and alcohol. They suffer from ennui, from boredom, and because they suffer from boredom they involve themselves in all sorts of questionable enterprises. So the third blessing is that you will know that you are important, that you count, that you have meaning in your life, that you know that G-d is not disgusted with you, that G-d

wants you and cares for you.

Finally there is the last blessing which says that, "I will break the poles of your yoke, and I will cause you to walk up straight." In other words, you will have dignity. You will never feel that you are garbage. You will always realize that you are as important as the next person, and this applies on an national level as well as on an individual level. It so happens that many people, even though they have peace and prosperity and know that they are important, feel inferior to other people. I am always struck by how some of our Jewish people feel inferior to successful gentiles in America. I remember how somehow used to always tell me how this woman in the bank liked him and so forth and so on. What difference did it make? These people are just like you and I. They have their good points and bad points, but, by and large, the people in River Oaks are not any better than any of us here. They are the same. In fact, the truth of the matter is that people who have fortunes and have inherited fortunes usually are living off money that was a result of a crime. Most big fortunes that were made in America have been as a result of crime. Look at the Kennedy fortune, which is actually based on bootlegging. What about the Rockerfeller's and how they connived and actually stole away people's small businesses? Many of the great fortunes in America were made during the times of the slave trade, etc., so that actually most of the big fortunes in America are a product of crime, so I do not feel that we should have to kowtow to people just because they have money. What's more, probably 50 or 60 years from now when people look at people who have money now they will find that most of their money was gotten because of savings and loan scandals or drug trafficking they were engaged in.

If we look, though, carefully at these blessings we will see that these blessings are stated for the nation of Israel, not for the individual. For an individual we do not know why things are good for some individuals and bad for other individuals. In Pirkei Ovos we say we do not understand the prosperity of the wicked and many times the terrible suffering of the righteous. When it comes to an individual level we cannot understand G-d's ways. When it comes to a national level it is clear that if nations do not conduct themselves in a proper way then curses are going to come upon them, and if they conduct themselves in a proper way then blessings come upon them. The same thing is true in physics. We can understand Newton's Law, but when it comes to sub-atomic physics it is only probability. We do not know what an individual atom or individual electron is going to do, etc.

Why are these two portions put together? After all, the rabbis did not have to teach us the laws of society, of organizing society right next to the blessings and the curses, but they did to teach us that these laws are also part of the moral code, that these laws were also given on Mount Sinai, that when it comes to organizing society that is also a religious endeavor. Religion is not just a personal matter which concerns itself with a few rituals, but religion also has to do with the way society is organized. Unless society is organized correctly it is hard to be religious, too. Religion deals with commerce and with business and with agriculture and the way you organize and distribute the wealth. If people fail to distribute the wealth properly they are going to suffer, then terrible curses are going to come upon them. It is interesting to note that when we talk about Shabbos, when we talk about the seventh day we say that it is Shabbos Ladoshin, Shabbos to G-d. When we talk about the holidays we talk about the holidays "to you", that this is a Shabbos Lochem, that the holidays are a sabbath "to

you". When we talk about the sabbatical year we talk about again a Shabbos Ladoshim, a Sabbath to G-d. When we talk about the jubilee year we talk about a Shabbos Lochem, a Shabbos to you. Why do we have these distinctions?

Shabbos, as we all know, stands for the spiritual stand of man, that man lives in seven dimensions: the six physical dimensions, which correspond to the six days of the week, which are, of course, up, down, north, south, east, west, but we also live in a spiritual dimension. Unfortunately, there are many people today who try to deny this spiritual dimension. They try to say that it does not exist and try to override it. This can only be done for a certain period of time otherwise the spirit rebels and shines through. Man has a spiritual nature. Unless recognize that we have to be more than ourselves otherwise we will act less than ourselves, we are going to have a difficult time living in this world. Communism tried to suppress this spiritual nature of man and ended up creating all sorts of heinous crimes, and so did the Nazis. They both faltered and they both were found greatly wanting. Communism is breaking up now, and one of the reasons for it is they failed to recognize the spiritual nature in man. This is something that is absolute. Man has a spiritual nature, and unless it can be satisfied one one it will have to be satisfied another. Unless Jewish people are going to give children spirituality and religion they are going to find it some other way in cults and other religions. They are going to find it or otherwise they are going to be destroyed. They will destroy themselves. Therefore, Shabbos Ladoshem, Shabbos is eternal, Shabbos can never be changed. Man has a spiritual nature. If you do not want to fulfill it through the Jewish religion it will be fulfilled some other way, maybe through witchcraft or terrible rites or cults, in which people get hurt and maimed, and it has to be given its due spirituality.

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What are we talking about when we talk about holidays? When we talk about holidays we are talking about something else. We are talking about life-turning events. Holidays celebrate important events in the life of a nation, and it is just as important as life-turning events in the history of an individual. Of course, most people today even in the Jewish religion do not really look at Jewish religion as something which expresses spirituality. For them it just expresses life-turning events. That's why in the city of Houston with 40,000 Jews you only really have nine or ten fulltime pulpit rabbis. The rest are teachers, part-time, retired, but that is really all you have because rabbis are only used for life-turning events. In Israel, on the other hand, for 40,000 Jews you would have a few hundred rabbis because the people turn to the rabbis to help them in their spiritual life, but this is not so in America.

When it came to the sabbatical year, G-d is also saying here this is also a Shabbos for G-d. UNless you are going to rest your land every seven years you are going to end up without having any agriculture at all. That's why in Africa they have what they call slash and burn. They procure some land and work it for a few years and then they have to move on because the land will not produce anything for them. They do not let it lay fallow. Today we add fertilizer and nutrients to the soil and rotate our crops. We want to make sure that the land will retain its nutrients so it can grow crops. We must take care of the land. When it comes to environmental concerns, unless we are going to take care of our environment we are going to die. The land will not produce any food. The land will not produce any crops so, therefore, we see that this is a Shabbos for G-d, that this is built into the nature of the world and we cannot, at our own peril, disregard environmental concerns.

When it comes to the jubilee year, when it talks about redistributing wealth, when we make sure that the lands revert to the original owners, when we make sure that there is no slavery among the Jewish people, when everybody is set free and all lands are returned, when wealth is redistributed, then this is a Shabbos for us because our societies will falter or be destroyed unless we redistribute wealth. The means have to be found to redistribute wealth. That is, of course, what many of the early social pioneers in this country and in England knew when they instituted income tax and inheritance tax, that unless you redistribute wealth in a very short time the wealth will be concentrated in a few hands. In the United States today one percent of the population owns 33% of the wealth. This is the highest concentration is has ever been. Ten percent owns 86% of the wealth. If this continues we will be like the South American countries. In fact, most people in America all they have today is their job. If they lose their job they have nothing. If we had a big recession here we would be in a lot of trouble. That is why probably the easiest way to solve our budget problems now is just to reintroduce the inheritance taxes the way they were before Reagan came into power. It would probably solve two problems. It would probably solve our budget problem. We could probably also make sure that wealth is redistributed. The Torah is telling us something very important. It is "for you". If you want to retain any wealth at all make sure that you redistribute parts of it otherwise a revolution will happen, otherwise people will seize your assets if they feel that they cannot support their family any other way.

So we see from here that the blessings of a country are directly tied to the way we organize society, the way we handle our environment, and the way we handle our social system. So, therefore, Behar and Bechukosai belong together. If we do not want curses to come upon the Jewish people not only

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do we have to be individually moral but society has to be moral, too. The way it is organized has to be moral. There is no conflict in Judaism between individual morality and social morality, as unfortunately there is many times in the United States and other places in the west.

I am reminded of the story they tell about a congressman who retired after 50 years. A man asked him if he had any advice he would like to give to new up and coming congressman. He said that, yes, he did have a piece of advice. They asked what it was. He said, "Well, I advise all new congressman to grow big mustaches." The reporter was astonished by this advice and asked the congressman what he meant by it. The congressman said, "Well, if new congressmen will wear big mustaches then they will not be able to read their lips." In the United States today taxation seems to be a bad word. Taxes are a bad word, but unless we are willing to pay our fair share, unless we are willing to use the taxes to help redistribute wealth we will end up by destroying our society and terrible curses will come upon us. Let's make sure that we always heed the words of the Torah so that we will have peace and prosperity and that we will also be blessed by knowing that we count and are important and also that we will be able to stand up straight. When a person is impoverished he cannot stand up straight. He cannot feel inner dignity. Let us all hope and pray that in this country and in Israel and throughout the world there will be peace and prosperity, that everyone will know that they are needed and wanted, and that no one will feel inferior to anyone else so the Mashiach will come. Amen.

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Today we read two Torah portions, Behar and Bechukosai. In the Torah portion, Behar, we learn, "And you should not wrong each man his neighbor. You shall fear the Lord, your G-d." Rashi explains on these words that we are not supposed to wrong anybody with words. For example, we are not supposed to vex people or provoke people with insults, and we are most assuredly not supposed to give people bad advice. The rabbis say the reason it says you should not wrong your neighbor and you should fear G-d is because many times people use the fear of G-d to wrong people. They say, "I can't give to that charity because this is wrong and that is wrong. I can't help this person because he has this vice or that vice. I have to attack and make fun of this individual because he does not honor G-d correctly." In other words, we can use the fear of G-d to exact our own vengeance.

I remember how many years ago I had a friend who was going out with a young lady. A second friend of mine did not know this, and he asked this young lady out, and a few months later he married her. My first friend was furious with my second friend, but never let on that he was furious. My second friend inherited some money from his grandfather. My first friend was a stockbroker. The second friend, not know the first friend was angry at him,

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gave him all his money to invest in the stock market. The first friend tried to cause my second friend to lose all his money, but the stock market, being what it is, made him a millionaire instead. My second friend was so grateful he gave my first friend a cadillac. My first friend felt so guilty he did not know what to do with himself. We have to be careful that we do not use the fear of G-d to wrong others.

In the Torah portion, Bechukosai, we learn how it says, "And if My statutes you will despise," and Rashi explains that this means that you will despise people who keep My statutes. This is easy to understand. We know that many of us criticize wholeheartedly people who observe a little more than we do and those who observe a little bit less than we do. In fact, a wag once noted that the definition of a fanatic to most people is a person who observes one more commandment than they do, and the definition of a goy is a Jew who observes one less commandment than they do. We can understand how when it comes to practice, people may despise others for observing certain commandments because it makes them feel guilty, but people do not realize this also refers to the spiritual sphere. Many times religious leaders will resent people who come

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into their community to teach Torah. They will not want to have any competition. They will resent the fact that new synagogues are being formed or new approaches are being tried.

We all know that we are in the middle of Sfira. Originally, this was a very happy time, but we know that since the days of Rabbi Akiva when his 24,000 students were killed during the Bar Kochba rebellion, this has become a sad time. The rabbis teach us that these 24,000 students were killed because they did not show proper respect one for another. They made fun of each other because they did not share the same common philosophy of Judaism. They all believed in Torah, but their approach to Torah was different.

We know that even today there are two different major philosophical groupings in orthodoxy with, of course, many variations. In Israel, they even have a terminology for it. One group is called Charaidim, or we would call them ultra-orthodox, and the other is Datim, or modern orthodox. There are four major differences between them. The Charaidim have not got much use for secular education, especially liberal arts. They also do not feel that the State of

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Israel has any religious significance. They support the State of Israel, but feel it has no religious significance. They do not say Hallel on Yom H'Atzmaut, etc. They also do not, by and large, want to have anything to do with reform and conservative. They also do not feel that it is necessary to teach women Talmud, and they place much greater limitations on the social mixing of men and women. The Datim, on the other hand, are in favor of secular education, feel the State of Israel has religious significance, feel women should study Talmud, and they are in favor of contact with reform and conservative. There are, of course, many variations among these positions. The important thing, though, is that as long as these groups are honest and do not try to misrepresent themselves or infiltrate others' institutions, they should all be respected. The Torah has its own corrective. Those who base their teachings on the Torah must justify what they do by the Torah, and whether your interpretation is right or left or center, the Torah will win out. Nobody knows what approach will eventually win out.

In the Haphtorah portion which we would have read had we only none Torah portion today, Behar, we learn about Jeremiah. Jeremiah was in jail. Why was

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he in jail? He was in jail because he had predicted that Jerusalem would be destroyed, the Babylonians would ravish the whole country of Judea, and take many of its inhabitants into exile. The king thought that he was undermining the morale of the army and had him jailed. While he was in jail, G-d appeared to him and told him to redeem the field of his kinsmen, as we are commanded to do in the Torah portion Behar. He was to weigh out good money and to buy back the field, which was in Anatot, the village in which he lived north of Jerusalem. He did what he was told, and he instructed his servant, Boruch, to take these documents, the bill of sale, the sealed one and the unsealed document, and place them in an earthenware vessel so that it would last for many days. In other words, he was to make sure that, according to modern parlance, he registered the deed with the title company. The question, though, is asked, why did they have to have a sealed bill of sale and an unsealed document? They would put one document on top, which could be read, and then another document which was sewed up in a leather pouch. Rabbi Soloveitchik said the reason for this was that the future is never clear to us, but is eventually going to happen.

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This is doubly emphasized in this Haphtorah. Jeremiah questions G-d and says, "G-d, You told me that the Babylonians were going to conquer Jerusalem, completely ravish Judea, including my city of Anatot, and here You are telling me to buy a field?" G-d answered by saying, "I am Hashem, the G-d of all flesh. Is anything hidden from Me?" In other words, do not despair, Jeremiah. Your people will come back.

The same is true of Torah. If people have made assumptions and interpreted the Torah too much to the left or the right or the middle, G-d will see to it that it comes back to the right interpretation. We just have to study Torah. Jewish institutions which promote Torah are not in competition. They complement each other in a great enterprise. Young Israel was founded in my office when Rabbi Zeidman came in the 1980's and said housing was too expensive around the shul. We have to do something for the young people. We gave the Young Israel a Torah. Joe Mendelovitz paid for the insurance. We gave them books, chairs, etc. Beth Rambam also started in my office when Timmy Kassin and Terry Sagheh came to see me. We also gave them a Torah. I believe in supporting the study of Torah, no matter what. I support the TORCH program

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and others, and I am proud to say that Rabbi Judy Abrams got her start in my Torah class.

We should not despise anybody who is learning Torah and trying to spread Torah. The Torah will correct all our assumptions either left, right, or middle. Unfortunately, we all make assumptions, some of which turn out to be true, and some not true, but G-d will see that they all get sorted out, and the correct teaching will come through.

I am reminded of the story about a woman who was very overweight and who went to the doctor. The doctor put her on a special diet. She was to eat regularly for two days and then skip a day, and then come back and see him at the end of the week. She should lose 5 pounds. She came back at the end of the week, and, lo and behold, she had lost 20 pounds. The doctor asked, "Did you follow my directions?" She replied, "I did, but I have to tell you that skipping a day was terrible. I have such rope burns." Each of us make different assumptions, but we should not despise anybody who learns and tries to teach Torah. May we by honoring everyone who teaches Torah be worthy of

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**having the Mashiach come in our day. Amen.**

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# Assuming Responsibility, Completing Ourselves The Mountain of Sinai

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We all know that the basis of Judaism is assuming responsibility for our actions. It is so easy to slough off responsibility and to blame others for our misdeeds. It is so easy to rationalize away our lack of sensitivity. We can always find somebody else to blame. We can always feel that it is impossible to change. We are too lowly creatures. We do not have the stature or strength to stand up for lofty principles. We are just lowly cogs in the wheel, and people will just have to accept us the way we are. On the other hand, we can also feel that it is degrading and demeaning for us to admit that we can make mistakes. Admitting mistakes could lead to terrible consequences in our relationships with our spouse or family or with our boss. We could lose our job, or we could lose respect in the eyes of those whom we love. Judaism says that we must be responsible. We cannot just confess our sins and say that is it. We have to change.

The Torah portions Behar and Bechukosai are many times combined. It seems strange that they are combined because they seem, on the surface, to talk about different things. Behar talks about how society should be organized, how we should have a Sabbatical Year and a Jubilee Year, how all

the land is to revert back to its original owners on the Jubilee Year and all slaves freed, etc. The Torah portion Bechukosai speaks about the blessings that will come upon us if we observe the Torah, and the curses that will come upon us if we do not.

The Torah portion, Bechukosai, starts off with the words, "If you will follow My decrees and observe My mitzvahs, and you will do them Va'Aseesem Osom." The Medrash says you should read it Va'Aseesem Atem -- and you should make yourselves. We all know that we are born incomplete. We must make ourselves, according to Judaism, by assuming responsibility for ourselves, for our community, for our people, and for the world. That's why the key word of the Torah portion Bechukosai is Eem -- if. In English, the middle of the word life is if. If we assume responsibility, we will have a good life. If we do not assume responsibility, we will not have a good life. We make ourselves by assuming responsibility. We complete ourselves by assuming responsibility.

One of the prime reasons why we Jews have been so hated much throughout the generations is that the nations of the world do not want to assume responsibility for themselves and their actions. Somebody has to be blamed

for their problems, and we Jews have been the scapegoat throughout the generations. We see this today in the Arab world, where, because they do not want to solve their problems, they must blame us. They do not want to become democracies, their leaders do not want to give power to the people, they do not want to confront the moral and practical problems that the world presents them, so we become their scapegoat. They need somebody to blame. Their failure to assume responsibility is the cause of this great hatred toward us. We see how Syria, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia promote the protocols of Zion and allege the fact that the Jews killed Jesus and attempted to kill Mohammed, and that we are a perfidious people. They publish blood libels against us, and call us monkeys and pigs.

This hatred for us is primarily because the Arabs and others do not want to assume responsibility for their actions. They need somebody to blame. No Allied soldier set foot on German soil after World War I. The Germans had completely defeated the Russians. They still held positions in France, but the German general staff knew the Americans were pouring in millions of men, and they decided that eventually they would lose the war in four or five years down the road, so they gave up. Somebody had to be blamed for Germany's defeat and the great inflation, which occurred afterwards in Germany, and we

Jews were it. It was and is the failure to assume responsibility for one's actions which causes and has caused so much grief in the world.

We know that in Judaism marriage is the happiest of occasions because the couple is assuming responsibility one for another. They complete themselves by marriage. Not everybody can marry, for one reason or another, but everyone can assume responsibility for his community, for his nephews and nieces or for his extended family, for his synagogue, for his people, etc. We all know of many good people who never married, but who nevertheless assumed responsibility for their family, for their synagogue, and for their people.

In this Torah portion, Bechukosai, we learn, "And they shall confess their sin and the sin of their father, for acting treacherously against Me, and for having behaved toward Me casually. I, too, will behave toward them casually, and I will bring them to the land of their enemies." What does this mean? They have confessed their sins, and G-d is still punishing them? The answer is, true, they have confessed their sins, but they have not assumed any responsibility for them. They, in effect, have said, "Yes, I did these sins, but this is just the way I am." They treated their sins casually. They refused to

take responsibility for them. The word for casually in Hebrew is Keree. This is an interesting word because it is also used to denote how we read the word in the Torah, and not how it is spelled. When we read the Torah, many times there is a Keree and K'Seev. Keree is the way we read it, but K'Seev is the way it is written. Many times, we can forget about how it is written. We can, so to speak, gloss over our sins. Yes, many times we can make excuses, but we have to know what our sins are, what we have done. We cannot fool ourselves. We may be able to smooth what we have done, but we have to assume responsibility for our deeds. We have to realize that our deeds are written on the hearts and minds of others. We cannot rationalize them away.

The Gemorah tells a story about this about Eliezer Ben Dordi, who ran after every courtesan. To support this habit, he engaged in thievery. He heard about a courtesan who lived far away, who was the hottest courtesan in the Roman Empire. He saved his money and traveled to see her. She took one look at him, and although she accommodated everyone, she would not have anything to do with him. She said, "You have gone too far." He took that as a sign from heaven that he had to change. He then turned to the mountains and said, "Mountains, help me." The mountains refused to help him. He then turned to the heaven and earth and said, "Help me." The heaven and earth

would not help him. He then turned to the sun and moon and said, "Help me." The sun and the moon would not help him. Then he turned to the stars and said, "Stars, help me," but the stars would not help him. He then put his hand between his knees in a fetal position and cried and cried, "G-d, help me," and G-d helped him. He was born anew and was able to live a good and upright life.

The question is asked in the Gemorah, what does this Medrash mean? The rabbis answer, he prayed to the mountain, which meant he said, "I was born in a certain place, and I am not responsible. The place made me do it." He then prayed to heaven and earth, which meant he said, "I am a human being, and this is the way humans act. I can't help it." He prayed to the sun and moon, which meant he said, "I am a product of my time. This is the way people act during our time in history." He prayed to the stars, which meant he said, "It is my nature. I have a high libido. I can't help myself." That did not help either. Then he cried and cried to G-d and was able to overcome his problems because he assumed responsibility. We have to assume responsibility for our actions to overcome our problems. Every twelve step program acknowledges this.

The Torah portions Behar and Bechukosai are combined because the Torah portion Behar also talks about assuming responsibility. The rabbis ask, why isn't this Torah portion called Behar Sinai instead of just Behar? After all, Sinai is the word right after Behar. The answer they give is that the word Behar, on the mountain, stands for standing straight, assuming responsibility. Sinai stands for being humble, for not making a fuss. After all, the Torah was not given on Mount Lebanon or Mount Herman, but on Mount Sinai, a low mountain. We are supposed to be humble. When it comes to life and to all relationships, we must sometimes stand tall and sometimes <sup>be</sup> humble. When it comes to moral principles, we have to stand tall. We must assume responsibility. We cannot be humble. If a wife finds her husband is embezzling or defrauding people, she should stand tall and make him quit. If a husband finds his wife is becoming a drug addict, he should stand tall and get her to quit, but on mundane matters, like what color the bathroom should be or what style the furniture should be, there should always be give and take. This Torah portion is called Behar because it stressed that we all have to take responsibility for our actions. We have to stand tall and assume responsibility when moral issues are involved.

That is the message also of the Torah portion Bechukosai. If we act morally,

things will go well for our society; if we act immorally, things will go badly for our society. We should act like a mountain when it comes to moral issues. We must always stand tall. On other issues, we can be a Sinai. We can be humble and non committal, but not on moral issues. Each of us must assume responsibility for ourselves, our family, our community, our people.

I am reminded of the story they tell about a young boy who came to his father with all F's on his report card and said, "Dad, is this the product of environment or heredity?" He had not yet learned that he had to assume responsibility for his acts. I hope he has learned this since then. We all must assume responsibility. We have been assured that if we will assume responsibility, we will lead blessed lives, lives which may not be free of problems, but lives in which we will be given the strength to overcome our problems. Let us hope that we will live responsible lives so that the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

Behal How Can you Be at the Best in Yourself

The Lord Porter Behal speaks about social justice. Johnson isn't just about personal spiritual growth but that society must provide equal opportunity for everyone that all poverty. Wealth should be eradicated in a few weeks. How people believe, top cuts will produce jobs. Jobs cuts in 2001 lost 2,500,000 jobs. Many cuts saved taxes at 2,000,000 jobs. Society must provide equal opportunity. Difference between U.S. & Mexico. Jobs important. Mr. Snow Mr. Bush when simple words. Mr. Sinait ignored. Don't we know where is why Mr. Moral reveal why Mr. Moral are just willing to sacrifice for another.