

Torah Weekly

Meaning and Chaos

What is the relationship between goodness, kindness, selflessness — and material success? Does goodness lead to health and prosperity? This question, at the heart of mankind's search for meaning, is frequently discussed in Jewish teachings.

The Torah presents us with a firm statement on this subject: "If you walk in My statutes, I will provide you with rain at the right time and the land will bear its crops and the trees will provide fruit... You will live securely in the land... But if you do not listen to Me and do not keep these laws... You will plant your crops in vain, because your enemies will eat them... you will flee even when no-one is chasing you..." (Leviticus Ch. 26).

In a few brush strokes, so to speak, these passages outline two pictures: one of "Redemption", i.e., national and individual wholeness, the other of *galut* ("exile") - fragmentation and conflict.

The first picture, that of Redemption, depicts a state of union between the spiritual and physical aspects of life. A good action produces a good effect in the material world. Body and soul are in harmony on every level of being. The people serve G-d, and therefore the crops grow and there is peace. Life has meaning.

The second picture, that of *galut*, comes as a punishment. Yet the state

of *galut* is not simply punishment and suffering, but *chaos*. *Galut* is the separation of spirit from matter.

In the situation of *galut* the goodness of the individual, or of the community, may well not be rewarded in immediate material terms. Sometimes the crops will grow, sometimes not. Even if they do grow, sometimes the enemy will capture them. There is constant uncertainty. *Galut* is a dislocation between matter and spirit, body and soul. Good people might be stricken with horrifying disease and pain; the wicked often seem to enjoy peace and prosperity.

On a deeper level, even in the state of *galut* there is a relationship between one's actions and the events which follow. Yet it is governed by an infinite Divine logic not completely accessible to our minds. To understand it we would have to be able to take into account spiritual realms, the world of souls. We would have to be able to appreciate certain processes in existence which have to unfold. If the full spiritual panorama were accessible to us, we would indeed see precise reward for each individual action. But this is not apparent in the physical world which we see before our eyes.

Yet the fact that we know that there is a deeper reality is itself a step forward. Although we are living in the world of *galut* so harshly depicted in the

"Rebuke" outlined in [Leviticus](#), a world in which the Holocaust could take place, we can be conscious that waiting beyond the shadows is another way to live, the world of Redemption. And in the closing verses of the Rebuke the [Torah](#) promises that Redemption is the state we should be in, and the one to which we will return.

Hence we should do what we can to help our practical daily world attain that state in which soul and body, spirit and matter, [G-d](#) and existence are one, unified. Every step in observance of Torah brings that realm of Redemption closer.

By Tali Loewenthal

Effort That Really Counts As we conclude the third book of the Torah in synagogues around the world this week, I am reminded of the traditional prayer recited upon completion of a tractate of the Talmud. In it, we thank G-d for the great opportunity to toil in the study of [Torah](#). The prayer contains a line that goes like this: "We toil and they toil. We toil and receive reward, while they toil and don't receive reward."¹ The prayer is obviously contrasting Torah study with all other activities and forms of work: while Torah study offers meaningful compensation, other endeavors don't.

But this needs further explanation. Is this really

May 22-28, 2022
21-27 Iyar, 5782

Torah Reading:
Leviticus 26:3 - 27:34
Haftarah:
Jeremiah 16:19 - 17:14

**PARSHAT
BECHUKOTAI**

Calendars

We have Jewish Calendars. If you would like one, please send us a letter and we will send you one, or ask the Rabbi/Chaplain to contact us.

Family Programs

Do you have family on the outside struggling? Please contact or have them contact our office to learn more about our family programs. You and they are not alone, we are here to help.

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We offer free Grape Juice and Matzoh for you to be able to make the blessings every Shabbos. Please have your chaplain / Rabbi contact us to enroll (available to all prisons).

Hyman & Martha Rogal Center
5804 Beacon Street
Pittsburgh, PA 15217
412-421-0111
Fax: 412-521-5948
www.alephne.org
info@alephne.org

so? Is there really no meaningful compensation in other fields of work? Last I heard, people were being compensated in other areas as well! So, how does Torah study differ? The explanation lies in careful examination of the words of the prayer: “. . .they toil and receive no reward.” Why did the author of this prayer of thanksgiving choose the word “toil” as opposed to, let’s say, “work” or “achieve”? The answer, I believe, is that Torah study is all about the effort and the “toiling,” in contrast with other endeavors or sciences, where the main focus is on accomplishment and the final product.

Torah study is mostly about the means, not so much about the ends. In other areas of life, who cares about your toiling? Toiling is just a means to an end. There is no reward for hard work and *shvitzing*. In fact, if you could accomplish the same job without toiling, that would be just as good. No extra reward is given for the toiling. It is mostly the results that count! In Torah study, however, it’s the opposite. Even if you were to toil in Torah study without any tangible results, that itself is worthy of reward!

The reason for this is because unlike other sciences, Torah study is not about accumulating knowledge. Unlike other self-help books and religious manuals, the Torah is not only about learning *how* to observe. Torah study is primarily about forging a relationship with [G-d](#). When we toil in the study of Torah, and connect to the fountain of G-d’s wisdom, we are at that moment experiencing oneness and forging a relationship with our G-d—regardless of whether we succeeded in totally mastering the subject we are studying. The relationship with G-d is experienced mostly while toiling and studying, not in the results or accomplishments.

This thought is echoed in this week’s Torah portion, which tells us: “If you will walk in my statutes” ([Leviticus 26:3](#)), explained by Rashi to be a reference to “toiling in Torah.” Again, the emphasis here is on the effort and not so much on the results.

What a refreshing approach and dramatic contrast to all those other areas, where the only thing that matters are your results! From a Torah perspective, we don’t care so much about what your grades are, or even how many titles and degrees you master in life. What is most cherished and valued by G-d is the hard work and effort that you put into your Torah studies! The quality and effort while on the journey of Torah study is way more important than the destination. *By Avraham Plotkin*

IN JEWISH HISTORY

Sunday, May 22, 2022 --- 21 Iyar, 5782

Kfar Chabad Established (1949)

The Chabad-Lubavitch village in Israel, Kfar Chabad, was founded by the sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn, on Iyar 21 of 1949. The first settlers were mostly recent immigrants from the Soviet Union, survivors of the terrors of World War II and Stalinist oppression. Kfar Chabad, which is located about five miles south of Tel Aviv and includes agricultural lands as well as numerous educational institutions, serves as the headquarters of the Chabad-Lubavitch Chassidic movement in the Holy Land.

Monday, May 23, 2022 --- 22 Iyar, 5782

Shabbat Commanded (1313 BCE)

Following the descent of the manna (the miraculous "Bread from Heaven" that sustained the Israelites in the desert), G-d commanded the Children of Israel to keep the Shabbat. This Shabbat was the 22nd of Iyar, of the year 2448 from Creation (1313 BCE) On that Friday morning, enough manna fell for two days' worth of meals, as on the Shabbat it would be prohibited to gather the manna. The "Two Loaves" of challah bread (*Lechem Mishneh*) that form the foundation of our Shabbat meal are in commemoration of the double portion of manna.

Tuesday, May 24, 2022 --- 23 Iyar, 5782

Water from a Rock at Rephidim (1313 BCE)

The Children of Israel arrived at Rephidim on the 23rd of Iyar, 1313 BCE -- 38 days after their exodus from Egypt. Rephidim was desert land and waterless, the people grumbled that they and their flocks were in danger of dying of thirst. G-d commanded Moses to take the elders of the people to a rock which he was to hit with his staff. Moses hit the rock and from the dry stone, a well sprang forth.

Wednesday, May 25, 2022 --- 24 Iyar, 5782

Germany Surrenders (1945)

In Rheims, France, the Chief-of-Staff of the German Armed Forces High Command signed the unconditional surrender documents for all German forces to the Allies, thus marking the official end of World War II in Europe.

The surrender took place following a fierce seven days of battles and truces across Europe.

Thursday, May 26, 2022 --- 25 Iyar, 5782

Passing of R. Yaakov Lorberbaum of Lissa (1832)

R. Yaakov Lorberbaum was a well-known halachic authority who served as rabbi in the Eastern European cities of Kalish, Lissa, and Stryi. Among the famous and widely-studied works of this prolific author are *Chavos Daas* and *Nesivos Hamishpat*, both in-depth commentaries on the *Shulchan Aruch* (Code of Jewish Law).

Friday, May 27, 2022 --- 26 Iyar, 5782

R. Saadia Gaon (942)

Iyar 26 is the yahrtzeit (anniversary of the passing) of Rabbi Saadia Gaon (892?-942), author of *Emunot V'deot*, one of the earliest works of Jewish philosophy. ("Gaon" was the title given to the leading Sages of Babylonia in the post-Talmudic period).

Shabbat, May 28, 2022 --- 27 Iyar, 5782

Idolatrous Practices Abolished (c. 135 BCE)

During Greek rule in the Land of Israel, the Greeks would hang idolatrous wreaths of roses on the doorways of the courtyards and stores, effectively rendering them forbidden for usage by the Jews. They would also write heretical statements on the foreheads of the Jews' oxen and donkeys, so they would be forced to sell them and would not own any animals for plowing. When the [Hasmoneans](#) overthrew Greek rule, they abolished these insidious practices, and that day was commemorated as a holiday in Talmudic times (*Megilat Taanit*, ch. 2).