



## **Behar-BeChukotai – Choosing Our Path to the Other Side of the Mountain**

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Over the course of the next two weeks we will read three parshiyot (portions) from the Torah (this week is a double Parsha). Each of the three parshiyot are linked by a common letter, Bet (Behar, BeChukotai and Bamidbar). A Bet at the beginning of a word means “in”. Behar – in/on the mountain. BeChukotai – in my laws. Bamidbar – in the desert/wilderness.

This past week I returned from a three week adventure with the Gross Schechter Day School 8<sup>th</sup> graders to Israel. During the trip, we climbed many mountains; we learned many laws and customs and spent time in the wilderness.

Out in the wilderness you can feel very much alone. It is an opportunity to realize how wide open our possibilities are but also how dependant we are on other people, and other things. We learned that in order to survive in the wilderness we must depend on what we find around us. By using plants we were able to gain sustenance from hunger and thirst. Water we discovered is a necessity. Without it, we are subject to the harshest of conditions.

There are those who feel that physically a person cannot survive for more than three days without water. The same can be true of Torah. Scholars have commented that the reason that the Torah is read four times a week (twice on Shabbat, once on Mondays and Thursdays) is to guarantee that we never go more than three days without hearing words of Torah. The Torah is our water, without it, we can't survive.

I am sure that each of us has gone more than three days at some period in our life without hearing the Torah read. If this is the case, how is it that we have survived? The Torah is not simply heard by reading it. The Torah is heard by our actions. Everything can have roots in the Torah. Torah is the path that we walk during our lifetime. For each of us, our journey on the path follows a different course.

There are many obstacles that might make the journey more difficult. These obstacles are mountains. They get in our path and seem impossible to overcome.

In order to overcome a mountain we have different paths to follow. For some of us, we take that mountain head on. We start at the bottom and make our way up. Often this is a slow climb. It can be very challenging. We might need to count on others to support us, to lift us up. We might need to be that support for someone else. We have to take it bit by bit. Each day we get a little closer to the top. Once on top of the mountain, we have a sense of accomplishment. We know that we worked hard and we stop to take in the view. On top of the mountain things look different. We don't see the burden, we see the beauty. In fact, the bigger the obstacle (mountain), the smaller the other mountains seem. The way down the mountain also feels much easier. We may feel lighter, or unburdened, maybe even a deeper understanding and appreciation for what we have conquered.

For others, the best way is around the mountain. Perhaps fear of heights, physical fortitude, or of the unknown, gets in the way and we look for an alternative route. We are looking to avoid the mountain all together. In order to find the best way, we might encounter some deep valleys – some very low points, but once we make our way around the mountain, we can look back and know that it was never really in our way.

The final way is to tunnel through. This can often be the scariest way. By tunneling through, we do not know if the mountain will collapse around us. We may be claustrophobic, we may have a fear of darkness, and we may lose our way. As we continue to dig, however, we might get to the root of the obstacle which would allow us to truly overcome it. The farther we dig, the closer we get to the end, the more we appreciate the light at the end of the tunnel.

Accessibility and understanding of the Torah can be an obstacle. Each of these mountain journeys could be how we approach our Judaism. For some, we take it on bit by bit, day by day. For some, we avoid it. We seek alternative approaches to Jewish life. For some, we look deep into the sources to understand the roots of our religion.

The Torah is also a series of stories that teach us how to live our lives. Everything can find its roots in the Torah. All of our learning and living has its basis in the words of the Torah. The Torah is not simply a series of laws that are given to us. The Torah is a tool that allows us to remember to look around and appreciate the vastness that is out there. It allows us to be “in” the mountains and valleys, to be “in” the wilderness charting a course to survive, to be “in” the light that comes from darkness. It allows us to be “in” the law, to delve “into” its complexities and to determine our best course of action.

We do not need to sit in services as the Torah is read, or see the words as they are lifted in front of us in order to truly hear words of Torah. It is found in how we speak, how we live our lives, how we conquer our mountains. Torah is not our obstacle for we are Torah. We are the lessons, the guides.

### **AS A FAMILY:**

Determine what obstacles are in front of you and the best way to overcome them. Live a life of Torah. Be mindful of its lessons, complexities and opportunities.

### **TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THIS WEEK’S PARSHA, TRY TO ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS:**

1. What is Shmitta? How/Why does it relate to Shabbat?
2. What is Yovel? When does it occur? What happens when it occurs?
3. Which of the Ten Commandments are alluded to towards the end of Behar?
4. How are the blessings and curses taught in the beginning of BeChukotai?
  - a. How many of each are there?
5. How are gifts brought to the Mishkan?
6. What is Maaser?