Jewish Tribune – Bechukosai

**Method in the Madness**

During the hot summer of 1959, a woman crossing a street in Bnei Brak was struck by a car and killed. A large crowd immediately gathered. On her Teudat Zahut, the identifying papers that every Israeli carries at all times, were her name and address in the city of Cholon. Someone was dispatched to notify the woman’s family of her tragic fate.

In the meantime, activists moved the body to a cool room to maintain and protect kavod hameis. The police arrived as well, eager to take the body for an autopsy.

It was a time of great friction between the Torah camp and the chilonim in Eretz Yisroel. It seemed like every hospital had a pathology department anxious to study the bodies of the deceased. One of the most prominent physicians in the country had made headlines by announcing, “To bury a complete body is a waste: cheating medical science.”

When the messengers returned from Cholon with the news that the woman had lived alone, a poor immigrant with neither family nor friends, rabbonim ruled that she was a meis mitzvah. A huge crowd of talmidei chachomim formed, reciting Tehillim around the body.

The police called for reinforcements, making clear their intention to seize the body. The locals responded in kind, drawing a huge crowd of bochurim, who encircled the meis and said Tehillim. Once the woman had a status of meis mitzvah, they insisted, she belonged to all of them. They were the next of kin and they would not let her go.

For a few hours, it seemed like a war was imminent, but, eventually, the policemen realized that it was a losing battle and they left. The unknown woman was prepared for burial and thousands of mourners accompanied her through Bnei Brak, stopping near each shul to recite Kaddish.

A resourceful young man decided to follow up on the story and find out the woman’s background. There had to be something in the history of this anonymous individual that could explain why she had merited such an impressive kavod acharon. The man discovered that she came from the town of Kossova, birthplace of the Chazon Ish, and his sister, who married Rav Yisroel Yaakov Kanievsky — the Steipler Gaon. Rav Chaim Kanievsky asked his mother if she remembered the woman. Rebbetzin Kanievsky recalled that she came from a family that had no connection with Yiddishkeit and didn’t even fast on Yom Kippur. They had been completely irreligious.

The curious talmid chochom continued his investigation and found an old woman who had arrived in Israel from Poland following the Holocaust. She told him that she remembered the woman from the war-time ghetto, where they had lived together in a tiny apartment. She recalled that the woman spent the dark days searching out bodies of Yidden who had died, either of starvation or by the Nazi bullet, and brought them to kever Yisroel.

The meis mitzvah who merited the levayah and kevurah of a tzadeikes earned it through her acts of greatness.

The above story was told by Rabbi Pinchos Lipschutz, the founding editor of Yated Ne’eman and has bearing on this week’s parsha Bechukosai.

Our parsha begins with HKBH promising that if Klal Yisroel will keep His [commandments](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/756399/jewish/The-613-Commandments-Mitzvot.htm), they will enjoy material prosperity and dwell securely in their [homeland](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/588018/jewish/Israel.htm). But He also delivers a harsh “rebuke,” warning of golus, persecution and other evils that will befall them if they abandon their covenant with Him.

**אִ**ם בְּחֻקֹּתַי תֵּלֵכוּ, וְאֶת מִצְוֺתַי תִּשְׁמְרוּ וַעֲשִׂיתֶם אֹתָם. וְנָתַתִּי גִשְׁמֵיכֶם בְּעִתָּם

If you follow my statutes and observe my commandments and perform them, I will give your rains in their time (Vayikra 26,2).

This section concludes with the words: וָאוֹלֵךְ אֶתְכֶם קוֹמְמִיּוּת. And I will lead you upright.

That’s the good part. The tochacha follows and contains the dire warnings that have sadly come true at various points in Jewish History. The parsha (Vayikra 26,14) begins:

וְאִם לֹא תִשְׁמְעוּ לִי, וְלֹא תַעֲשׂוּ אֵת כָּל הַמִּצְוֺת הָאֵלֶּה

And if you do not listen to me, and do not perform these mitzvos…

And this sad reading concludes with the words:

... אֵלֶּה הַחֻקִּים וְהַמִּשְׁפָּטִים וְהַתּוֹרֹת אֲשֶׁר נָתַן ה' בֵּינוֹ וּבֵין בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּהַר סִינַי בְּיַד מֹשֶׁה.

These are the statutes, ordinances and laws that Hashem gave between Him and the children of Israel on Mount Sinai, by the hand of Moshe. (Vayikra 26,46)

My friend, Simon Baum, noted that the “good” part begins with an aleph (א) and ends with a sof (ת) - **אִ**ם בְּחֻקֹּתַי תֵּלֵכוּ ... וָאוֹלֵךְ אֶתְכֶם קוֹמְמִיּוּ**ת**

A to Z, א to ת, when things are good and we are blessed, everything appears in order.

But when things aren’t so good, and troubled times ensue, there seems no rhyme or reason and certainly no order. It all appears to be random, chaotic and haphazard.

But if you look more closely, you will see there is an order, just a different one.

The tochacha begins and with vov (ו) and ends with a heh (ה). A full circle of the alphabet, just a different order - **וְ**אִם לֹא תִשְׁמְעוּ לִי ... בְּיַד מֹשֶׁ**ה**

When a Polish war survivor living in poverty in Cholon with no acquaintances, family or friends is struck down by a car and killed, it’s a tragedy. And then, thousands come out and say Tehillim, recite Kaddish, and accompany her body, it’s perplexing. How? Why?

Then we hear that she performed chessed shel emes, kindness that endures, and it endured for her. For a brief moment, we are privy to a wider lens and see some sort of order. Not the usual order, but an order nonetheless.

We are living in bizarre and unsettling times but we should take comfort in the knowledge that only HKBH has a full view and that there is an order but we are not always privy to it.

May we merit to the blessings in this week’s parsha and hear besuros tovos very soon.

**Rabbi Golker is the Menahel of Hasmonean High School. To listen to his shiurim, go to TorahAnytime.com or JewishPodcasts.Org**