

Erev Shabbos · 21 Iyar 5786 · May 8, 2026

Parshas Behar-Bechukosai — Haftarah Yirmiyahu 16–17

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Motzaei Shabbos

SEFIRAS HAOMER

Day 37

Gevurah sheb'Yesod

PIRKEI AVOS

Ch. 5

read this Shabbos

DVAR TORAH

A Step Beyond.

On April 6th of this year, four astronauts aboard NASA's Orion spacecraft traveled 252,756 miles from Earth — farther than any human in fifty-six years. As they flew behind the Moon, plunging into a forty-minute radio blackout, they witnessed something no one had ever seen: a total solar eclipse observed from *beyond* the Moon itself. The previous record was set in 1970 by Apollo 13, fighting to survive.

During those fifty-six years between Apollo and Artemis, tens of thousands of engineers and technicians showed up day after day on a program whose culmination many would never live to see. The awe of those forty minutes behind the Moon was earned by half a century of not particularly remarkable, daily work.

The Torah has a word for this kind of relentless forward motion. *Im bechukotai teleichu*, our parsha begins — “if you go in My statutes.”¹ Noting the unusual phrasing, Rashi explains that this means *she-tihyu ameilim baTorah* — “that you should be toilers in Torah.” *Amelus* implies heavy, grueling labor — the same word the Torah uses for the work of slaves. In Jewish life, this labor is not physical chains but the quiet dedication of mind and spirit. We have a famous template for what that looks like.

When Rabbi Akiva was forty, he did not know the alef-beis. He thought it was too late. Then he noticed a rock near a well, a hard stone with a groove carved clean through it, and asked who had hollowed it out. The answer: the water that falls on it, day after day, drop by drop.²

Rabbi Akiva drew the lesson: it is not the force of the water but its persistence. If soft water can pierce hard rock one

drop at a time, Torah can penetrate even a hardened mind, one day at a time. He went to the schoolhouse, sat down among the children, and began to learn the Hebrew letters.

How do we strive toward radical transformation, one step at a time?

That is *amelus*. It is rarely dramatic. Most days it looks like an engineer at a desk year after year, a tired parent at the kitchen table at eleven o'clock at night with a sefer, Rabbi Akiva practicing the alef-beis,

a teacher reviewing the same verses year after year for decades.

The Rebbe taught that this generation is the last of exile and the first of redemption. Yet to us, our daily lives may rarely feel redemptive. We wake up, work, make dinner, try to be a little better than yesterday. It feels mundane — as if we were taking the same small steps over and over.

But this is the secret of *teleichu* — of ongoing progress. True, lasting, radical transformation is always approached one step at a time. A drop of water doesn't merely wet the stone; given enough time, it pierces through its very nature. Fifty years of equations on a chalkboard doesn't just build a faster plane; it breaks the grip of gravity entirely. The *amelus*, the ardor, is the quiet machinery of transformation: because we have put in the daily drops, our next step doesn't repeat yesterday's — it launches from there. It is precisely the quiet work of piercing the rock that gives us the escape velocity to leap into the dark — to reach the most hidden, unlit places in this world, the dark side of the Moon, and finally light them up.

¹ Vayikra 26:3.

² Avos d'Rabbi Nasan 6:2.

OUR MOMENT

A Good Space to Grow.

the prophet Yirmiyahu, read this Shabbos, on where a person plants his roots

In a cool pocket of the Pacific off the Solomon Islands, marine scientists have discovered a single living organism so vast they at first mistook it for a shipwreck. It is one coral colony — a *Pavona clavus*, the species commonly called *shoulder blade coral* — 112 feet wide, 105 feet long, visible from space.¹ Its species typically grows two or three meters across in a lifetime. This one is over three hundred years old. The reefs around it have suffered bleaching, warming, cyclones. This colony has not. Scientists believe the difference is where it sits — deep enough, protected enough, positioned in currents that kept it fed while the shallower reefs around it burned out. Same ocean. Same centuries. Different position.

The haftarah from Yirmiyahu, read this Shabbos, sets two figures side by side. “Cursed is the man who trusts in man, who leans on flesh for his strength”² — the one who thinks that human power is the moving force behind his life, and from Hashem his heart turns away.³ And “blessed is the man who trusts in Hashem, and Hashem becomes his trust.”⁴ Both men live on the same earth, face the same pressures. The difference is where each one draws his strength.

The first becomes “like a bare shrub in the wilderness” — standing but dry, alive but bearing nothing. The second

becomes “like a tree planted by the waters.”⁵ In good weather, you cannot tell them apart. The difference shows only when the rains stop. When the years go dry. Then one loses its leaves, and the other stays green.

“And he shall be like a tree planted by the waters, that spreads out its roots by the river. He shall not fear when the heat comes; his leaf shall be green.”

YIRMIYAHU 17:8

exposed reefs around it bleached and died.

The coral the size of a city block did not survive three centuries because the ocean spared it. It survived because of where it sat — protected, remote, positioned in conditions that kept it fed while the exposed reefs around it bleached and died.

The first man Yirmiyahu describes lives in a desert he cannot leave. The second lives by waters he cannot exhaust. Both, the prophet is saying, are choices. And both are made today.

¹ *Pavona clavus* colony, Solomon Islands.

² Yirmiyahu 17:5.

³ Malbim on Yirmiyahu 17:5.

⁴ Yirmiyahu 17:7.

⁵ Yirmiyahu 17:6, 17:8.

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ON THE HORIZON

Sun, May 17 Rosh Chodesh Arrived at Sinai. Rested from the journey.	א' סיון	Mon, May 18 Moshe ascended. “You shall be to Me a kingdom of priests.”	ב' סיון	Tue, May 19 Boundaries set around the mountain.	ג' סיון
Wed, May 20 Three days of separation begin.	ד' סיון	Thu, May 21 “We will do and we will hear.”	ה' סיון	May 22–23 Shavuot Matan Torah. Book of Ruth.	ו' סיון

Shabbos 86b–87a. R' Yossi holds Moshe added a day, placing Matan Torah on 7 Sivan.

PIRKEI AVOS · CHAPTER FIVE

AVOS 5:22

Turn It On, Turn It On Again.

*Turn it and turn it, for all is in it. And in it shall you look.
And grow old and worn in it. And from it do not move — for
you have no measure better than this.*

הַפֶּךְ בָּהּ וְהַפֶּךְ בָּהּ דִּכְלָא בָּהּ · וּבָהּ תִּתְחַזֵּי · וְסִיב
וּבִלְהָ בָּהּ · וּמִנָּה לֹא תִזְוַע · שְׂאִין לָךְ מִדָּה טוֹבָה
הַיְמָנָה

The Maggid of Mezritch reads the Mishna as a warning.¹ When a person opens the Torah and sees how carefully the Sages searched for truth in every detail — how they examined every act, every word, every thought, and measured each one against the real — that person should come away humbled. He should see how far he still is from the truth, and from that recognition, fear of sin should grow. But if he learns only to sharpen his mind, only to be known as learned, then “the more knowledge he adds, the more the

heart inflates.” The Torah was not given to make a person clever. It was given to make him careful.

The Sfas Emes takes *d'kulah bah* — “for all is in it” — at its word.² Every letter of Torah contains everything a person needs, at every moment. Not as a metaphor. The verse says “a great voice that did not cease”³ — meaning that voice is still sounding in every letter, without interruption. But how much of it a person hears depends on how much he knows there is nowhere better to look. “All is in it” is not a fact to be believed. It is a door that opens to the degree you trust it.

¹ Maggid of Mezritch, *Yosher Divrei Emes* 3:1.

² Sfas Emes, *Mishpatim* 5:4.

³ Devarim 5:19.

FROM THE DAF · SOTAH 37

First In.

The Sages of the Talmud picture the moment at the sea. The Egyptians are coming. The water has not yet split. Two million Jews stand on the shore, and the tribes are arguing — *I will go in first*. Each tribe wants the merit of being the one whose body parts the waters.

While they argue, one man jumps. Nachshon ben Aminadav, prince of Yehudah, walks into the sea. He goes in to his ankles. To his knees. To his waist. To his neck. The water has not yet moved. Az — only then — does the sea split.¹

The Talmud asks the question we did not know we should ask. *Why did the tribe of Yehudah merit kingship?* Three

answers are given on the same page. **Rabbi Tarfon** says: because Nachshon sanctified Hashem's name when he leaped. **Rabbi Yehudah** says: because Yehudah was the first to confess his sin in the matter of Tamar. **Rabbi Meir** says: because Yehudah said *Mah betza* — what gain is there in killing our brother — and saved Yosef.² Three different acts. One conclusion: Yehudah is given kingship.

Yehudah earned kingship by stepping forward when the others were still talking. The blessing is not given to the one who waits to see whether it is safe. It is given to the one who acts as if Hashem can be trusted before the trust has been confirmed.

¹ Sotah 37a.

² Sotah 36b–37a.

THE QUESTION · FOR YOUR PEN THIS WEEK

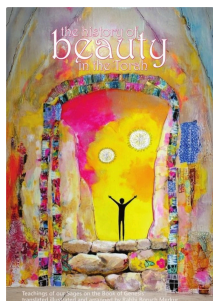
Bechukosai closes with the only place in the Torah where the Patriarchs appear in reverse order — *Yaakov, Yitzchak, Avraham*. Why are they listed backwards here? Send us your answer.

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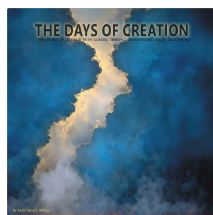
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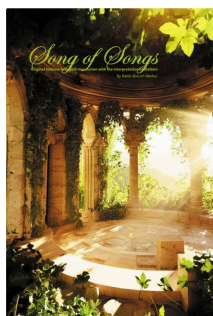


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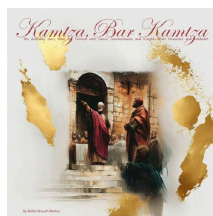


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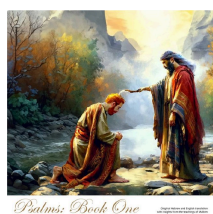


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