

Chapter 26:14-46 (Parashah Bechukotai) contains some of the direst warnings we know. In Parashah Ki Tavo, near the end of the Torah, Moses spells it out again, and the second paragraph of the Shema Yisrael gives us a concise version. The message is clear: If we are indifferent toward HaShem, HaShem will treat us with indifference. We live in an eternal covenant – a reciprocal contract between us and HaShem. At the foot of the mountain we received our Torah and in doing so, pledged to uphold our side of the agreement. Sounds easy enough, but we humans are often impulsive and impatient, preferring instant gratification over careful planning. Our path from Egyptian slavery to the Promised Land is full of sad examples: Protests, slander, fearmongering, jealousy, power struggles, the Golden Calf ... poor Moses had a hard time with us, and let's face it – things haven't changed much since then. We still act in haste without considering the consequences, and we usually end up paying dearly.

Here, at the end of the Book of Leviticus, our Torah uses a unique word for this human weakness: *keri* (קרי), which appears seven times in this chapter and nowhere else in the TaNaKh, has a whole range of meanings: *indifference, stubbornness, aversion, unwillingness, carelessness, insensitivity*. All of these definitions imply willful disregard for our contractual agreement. The Rambam (Maimonides) links this word to *mikreh* (מקרה), which means *by chance, happenstance*, and notes that this is not the same as punishment. Punishment is direct and selective, but blind chance knows no boundaries and makes no distinctions. HaShem repeatedly declares that if the people continue to act with indifference toward HaShem, then HaShem will likewise act indifferently toward them, and the result will be sevenfold punishments. In other words, HaShem will withdraw the special protection that is part of our covenant, leaving us open to the whims of nature and of our fellow humans.

I find it particularly meaningful that this reading occurs during the period of Omer Counting, in which the number seven plays such an important role. The word *keri* is used seven times, and there are seven punishments for our indifference. We count seven weeks from Pesach to Shavuot, going in 49 steps from being unwilling slaves to Pharaoh to being willing servants of HaShem. If we count using the Kabbalistic Tree of Life, we know we have just entered the week of *Yesod*, the 6th week of counting. This sefira is the attribute of foundation, the supporting structure underlying everything from buildings to contracts to our spiritual lives. It also represents male sexual energy – essential, and beautiful if used wisely, but devastating if used *b'keri*, with indifferent wantonness. *Yesod* also stands for righteousness. *Pirke Avot* 10:25 (Chapters of the Fathers, which we study during this time), states, וְצַדִּיק יְסוּד עוֹלָם. The *Tzaddik* (righteous one) is the foundation of the world. Righteous people model behavior that is prudent, considerate, and life-giving. Using our creative energies wisely results in harmony amongst our fellow humans and in all of nature, in the spirit of our *Mitzvot*, and thus in the spirit of our covenant with HaShem.

This is the hopeful light in which Chapter 26 ends. The land, which suffered greatly because of our indifference, recovers, as does the nation itself. Although the indifference of the majority brought disaster upon all, even those who did uphold the covenant, we are assured that there will always be a remnant left, which will again grow strong and prosper. We have survived the destruction of both Temples, we have survived millennia of persecution, we have survived war and disease, and through it all, we as a people have never abandoned hope. We cling to hope because we believe that we live in an eternal covenant with the Creator of All. May we always find the strength to uphold our part of this covenant.

Shabbat shalom!