



**Parashat Behar/Be-hukkotai
Jeremiah 16:19-17-14
May 16, 2015 / 27 Iyyar 5775**

This week's Haftarah is taken from the prophet Jeremiah and is made up of a series of sayings by the prophet sometime in the late 7th to early 6th century B.C.E. This Haftarah is paired with the conclusion the book of Leviticus and emphasizes reward for having faith in God and punishment for those who fail to follow God's ways. To quote Jeremiah: "Cursed is the man who trusts in man...(but) Blessed is one who trusts in Adonai.. (17:5-8)."

Many of us who read through this text will struggle with the seemingly simplistic notion embodied in this verse. If we believe in God and follow God's teachings, everything will be ok; but if not, we will suffer. For many of us, our experience of the world simply doesn't work that way. There are many people of faith who seem to suffer and many people with little to no faith who live quite comfortably in our world.

Given this challenge, how are we to understand a text that appears clear on the surface but challenges our daily reality? One clue can be found in a commentary by the Malbim, Rabbi Meir Laib ben Yehiel Michal, (1809-1879) on the word "Blessed" that is used in this verse. The Malbim writes: Blessed is one (asher lo l'vad, who is not alone), who trusts in God....

Perhaps the Malbim is suggesting that faith in God is not simply about reward and punishment in a literal sense. When we say that we will be blessed if we trust in God and cursed if we trust in man alone, we are saying that we feel blessed because God's presence can help us discover a deeper sense of meaning as we go through our daily lives. We feel blessed because with God's presence in our lives, we can never be "alone."

Embracing God's presence in our life and in our world is not the same as having blind faith. Our relationship with God can, and most likely will, be filled with struggle. That is why we as a people, are called Yisrael (God wrestlers). But if we are open to engaging in this struggle, and working to discover God's presence in our lives and in our world, we may indeed come to realize that we are not alone as we come to find a deeper sense of blessing, meaning, and purpose in our lives.

Ironically, trust in people is also critical to this endeavor. It is true that Jeremiah says that those who trust in man are cursed. But look more closely: Cursed is one who trusts in man, who makes mere flesh his strength and turns his thoughts from the Lord (17:5-6). For Jeremiah, trust in one another alone is problematic. But if we can let God into our human interactions, exploring

how we might act as God's partner to bring God's presence into one another's lives- we will surely be blessed.

As you read this week's Haftarah, ask yourself: How does God bring blessing into my life? How might I, as God's partner, bring blessing into the life of my fellow human beings?

This week's Haftarah commentary is reprinted from one originally written for the Unraveller for May 18, 2012 by Rabbi Aaron Schonbrun of Congregation Toret El in Oakhurst, NJ. Rabbi Schonbrun is originally from San Diego, CA. He graduated from Washington University in St. Louis with degrees in Psychology and Jewish/Near Eastern Studies having spent his junior year at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Rabbi Schonbrun was ordained at the Jewish Theological Seminary in May 2004, at which time he also received a Masters Degree from the William Davidson School of Education. From 2004 to 2010 Rabbi Schonbrun served as one of the rabbis of Congregation Beth David in Saratoga, CA.