

# Torah Table Talk

## What does it Mean to Place One's Trust in God?

Parshat Beha'alotecha

Leviticus 26:3 – 27:34/ Jeremiah 16:19 – 17:14



*Torah Table Talk is dedicated to three special events: Naomi Greenspan's graduation from Washington University, Mordechai Greenspan's upcoming graduation from Solomon Schechter High School on Long Island, as well as Mordechai's eighteenth birthday. May you both go from strength to strength!*

The *Haftorah* for Parshat Beha'alotecha contains a series of prophecies and statements attributed to Jeremiah. Like the Torah portion for this Shabbat, the focus of these statements is on blessings and curses. In the final chapters of Leviticus, the people of Israel are told about the consequences of their actions. God tells them "If you follow my statutes and faithfully observe my commandments, then I will grant you rain in its season..." On the other hand, "If you do not obey me and do not observe these commandments...I will wreak misery upon you..." The consequences of good and evil, of obedience and rebellion, appears to be so very clear.

Similarly Jeremiah tells the people, "Cursed is he who trusts in man," and "Blessed is he who trusts in the Lord." While the Torah focuses on the observance of *Mitzvot*, the *Haftorah* focuses on *bitachon*, trust in the Lord. Such trust is a source of vitality and life. According to Jeremiah, God is a source of strength, hope, and a stronghold. He ends with a prayer that has become part of the weekday *Amida*, "Heal me and let me be healed; save me and let me be saved; for you for You are my glory."

### **Jeremiah 17: 5-8**

Thus said the Lord, 'Cursed is he who trusts in man, who makes mere flesh his strength, and turns his thoughts from the Lord. He shall be a bush in the desert, which does not sense the coming of god; it is set in the scorched places of the wilderness, in a barren land without inhabitant. Blessed is he who trusts in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord alone. He shall be like a tree planted by waters, sending forth its roots by s a stream: it does not sense the coming of heat, its leaves are ever fresh; it has no care in the year of drought, it does not cease to yield fruit.'

### **Psalms 146**

Put no trust in princes, in mortals who can give no help. When his breath goes, he returns to the dust, and on that very day his plans perish. Happy is he who has the God of Jacob as his help, whose hope rests up the Lord his God.

### **Job 13:15**

Keep quiet; I will have my say; come what may upon me. How long! I will take my flesh in my teeth I will take my life in my hands. Though He slays me, yet will I trust in Him. Yet I will argue my case before Him. In this too is my salvation: That no impious man can come into his presence.

### **Conclusion of the weekday Shacharit Service:**

Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord alone. Trust in the Lord forever and ever, for the Lord God is an everlasting stronghold. Those who know your name put their trust in You, for you have not forsaken those who seek you, O Lord. The Lord was pleased for the sake of His righteousness to render the Torah great and glorious

### **On all American Coins**

In God we trust...

### **From the Department of the Treasury:**

The motto IN GOD WE TRUST was placed on United States coins largely because of the increased religious sentiment existing during the Civil War. Secretary of the Treasury Salmon P. Chase received many appeals from devout persons throughout the country, urging that the United States recognize the Deity on United States coins. From Treasury Department records, it appears that the first such appeal came in a letter dated November 13, 1861. It was written to Secretary Chase by Rev. M. R. Watkinson, Minister of the Gospel from Ridleyville, Pennsylvania.

### **Jewish Values Rabbi Louis Jacobs**

Trust in God does not mean confidence that all one's undertakings will prosper. Bittahon (*sic*) is far removed from undue sanguinity about the future...in Jewish thought it is not advocated as a substitute for honest toil and effort...Trusting in God is not incompatible with keeping the powder dry.

### **An adaptation of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson in Likkutei Sichos 5751**

In a time of personal crisis, the *Tzemach Tzedek* once advised one of his followers, "Think good and the outcome will be good." The optimism this directive encourages is not euphoric. Instead, it is based on the firm belief that everything which transpires in the world is guided by G-d's Providence and "Everything the Merciful One does is intended for the good." When a person internalizes this belief, his life is suffused with *bitachon* (confident trust) and he is able to carry out productive and fruitful activities without being inhibited by worry or fear.

*Bitachon* is the very opposite of escapism. It does not mean that a person should believe that because G-d's mercies are infinite, He will save him without any effort on his part, or that whether his conduct is worthy or unworthy, he will prosper. Instead, it requires a person to act maturely within the world and employ all the natural means at his disposal. Nevertheless, he should realize that these efforts can never, in and of themselves, promise success. Therefore, one must "cast your burden on G-d," confident that "He will sustain you."

*(The Tzemach Tzedek was Rabbi Menachem Mendel, the third rabbi of the Chabad (Lubavitch) movement. He lived from 1789 -1866)*

### **Mesilat Yesharim, Chapter 21; Rabbi Moses Chayyim Luzzato**

One should cast one's burdens upon the Lord in the knowledge that no man is deprived of what has been apportioned to him. Our sages said: "How much sustenance a man should obtain is fixed during the Days of Penitence, between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur." (Betzah 16a) Or as they say elsewhere, "No person can deprive from his neighbor of that which has been apportioned to him, even to the extent of a hairs breadth. In fact the amount of sustenance allotted to a person would be granted even if he sat idle, were it not for the primal curse expressed in the words, 'By the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread.' ...when a person has done some work he should leave the rest to God and not be worried concerning worldly matters. Only then are his mind and heart in a condition to cultivate saintliness and perfect piety.

## Questions for Discussion

1. What does the prophet Jeremiah mean when he tells his contemporaries to put their trust in God? Is trust always a realistic path to follow in our relationship with God – why or why not? How is putting your trust in God different from having faith in God?
2. Look at the other quotes from the Bible and the Prayer book above. Note that liturgy adopts the verse above from Jeremiah but gives it a new meaning by placing it in a slightly different context. What do all of these verses say about the meaning of trust in God? How can we trust God in times of suffering? (Note that Job makes this statement after losing his children, his wealth, and his health.)
3. Does trust in the Divine lead to passivism? Compare the Lubavitcher Rebbe's understanding of bitachon with that of Rabbi Moshe Chayyim Luzzato. How are they different from one another?
4. Why do American coins contain the inscription, "In God we trust?" Why do you think this expression appears on our coins? Should it appear on our coins?
5. How are the blessings and curses in our Torah portion and in the Haftarah different from one another? In what ways might it be a blessing to have such complete and profound trust in God? How are the consequences of our actions different from one another when we compare the verses in Jeremiah with those in the book of Jeremiah?

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**Torah Table Talk** is a weekly e-publication of Rabbi Mark B Greenspan sponsored by the Oceanside Jewish Center on Long Island, New York. If you would like to subscribe to Torah Table Talk please send an e-mail to [Tabletalk@oceansidejc.org](mailto:Tabletalk@oceansidejc.org). To remove your address from this list, send a blank email to [tabletalk-unsubscribe@oceansidejc.org](mailto:tabletalk-unsubscribe@oceansidejc.org). Readers are invited to sponsor a weekly edition of TTT. To see an archive of sermons and TTT go to <http://www.oceansidejc.org/rebmark/RabbiGreenspan.html>

*“All it takes to study Torah is an open heart, a curious mind  
and a desire to grow a Jewish soul.”*