



Between a Rock and a Hard Place

Torah Reflections on *Parashat Behar - Behukotai*

Leviticus 25:1-27:34

22 Iyar 5766

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“Between a rock and a hard place” is an idiom which indicates that you have to decide between two unfavorable alternatives. This week’s Torah section, while “between a rock and a hard place” provides not choices between inauspicious possibilities but rather a guided path toward healing and wholeness.

In the liturgical calendar, the *sedra* titled *Behar* (“On Mount Sinai”, beginning with Leviticus 25) is followed by the *sedra* titled *Behukotai* (“In my statutes”, beginning with Lev 26:3), which in turn is followed by the *sedra* titled *Bemidbar* (“In the Sinai Desert”, beginning with Numbers chapter 1)

In our religious tradition, we travel from the high mountain eventually to the vast and open possibilities of a pristine wilderness, and along the way we learn about *darkhei eretz* (roads of respect) and *darkhei shalom* (paths of peace.)

Between the mountaintop, and the desert lie many possibilities. Stated clearly in the *sedra Behukotai*, when we walk in God’s ways, and observe God’s commands, then God dwells among us, we will do well, and stand upright (Lev 26:3, 6, 12-13.) That theme is reflected also in the associated *Haftara* (prophetic reading), when Jeremiah explains that those who trust in God are like a “tree planted by the waters, sending forth its roots by a stream . . . its leaves are ever fresh.” Addressing God as the “Fountain of living waters,” Jeremiah asks, “Heal me . . . and let me be healed, save me and let me be saved; for you are my glory” (Jer 17:8, 13-14.)

Being atop a mountain can be an admirable achievement. The view of surrounding peaks and forest glens dense with fir, pine, or spruce delight the eye, and lift up one’s heart. Likewise, standing in the quiet desert, viewing majestic contours and vast stretches of space can leave one breathless.

On the other hand, people can feel alone atop the mountain, or lost in the wilds of the endless desert; between a rock and a hard place. Mountains and deserts may encompass dark valleys, places of shadow, danger or fear. At times, we all suffer from the stresses in our lives. When someone we know is in one of those places, we can model Godly behavior as we help one another to walk with the divine. Literally or figuratively, we can hold the hands of those who are in pain or suffering, offering comfort and compassionate hearing. We can model a caring presence showing affection and respect for our fellow beings, loving peace and

pursing peace. In those moments, God will be with us and among us, blessing us in our daily endeavors. God will heal us and save us, as through our concern and consideration, we bring healing and salvation to others.

Holy One of Blessing, help us to be a comforting presence to those who feel isolated or alone, that through our being we bring them and ourselves closer to you, the healing Fountain of Living Waters.

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This Torah Reflection was written Rabbi David J. Zucker, PhD, BCC, who is Rabbi/Chaplain and Director of Spiritual Care at Shalom Park, a senior continuum of care center, in Aurora, CO. His latest book is The Torah: An Introduction for Christians and Jews (Paulist Press, 2005). It is brought to you by the Bay Area Jewish Healing Center (a beneficiary of the Jewish Community Federation of San Francisco, the Peninsula, Marin and Sonoma Counties), an affiliate of the Institute on Aging.

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