On the Shabbos Kodesh which approaches auspiciously, we will read parshas Bechukosai. We have learned in the Gemara (Megillah 31b) that Ezra HaSofer instituted that Yisrael read the curses found in parshas Bechukosai before the holiday of Shavuos and the curses found in parshas Ki Savo before Rosh HaShanah:

"תניא רבי שמעון בן אלעזר אומר, עזרא תיקן להן לישראל, שיהו קורין קלוות שבתורת כהנים קודם עצרת, ושבמשנה תורה קודם ראש השנה, מאי טעמא, אמר אביי ואיתימא ריש לקיש, כדי שתכלה השנה וקללותיה".

—

it was taught in a Baraisa: Rabbi Shimon ben Elazar says: Ezra decreed that Yisrael should read the curses found in sefer Vayikra prior to Shavuos and those in sefer Devarim prior to Rosh HaShanah. For what reason? Abayei said, while some say that Reish Lakish said it: So that the year may end along with its curses.

Then, the Gemara asks: "בשלמא שבמשנה תורה איכא כדי שתכלה שנה וקללותיה ראש השנה היא" — indeed, Shavuos is also a type of New Year . . . with respect to the fruits of the trees.

Here is how the Tiferes Shlomo (Ki Savo) explains the matter:

"יש לתת טעם בענין התוכחה, מה שאנו קוראים בעת הזאת שתכלה שנה וקללותיה, הוא כמו שאומרים (הושע יד ג) ונשלמה פרים שפתינו, שאם חס ושלום נגזר אשר לא טוב, הנה יצאנו ידי חובתינו בקריאת הדברים האלה, וממילא ית转会נו כולם לברכה".

This body of curses, known as the Tochachah, the Rebuke, accomplishes the goal of "let the year end along with its curses;" based on the principle of (Hoshea 14, 3): ונסלמה פרים שפתינו — and let our lips substitute for bulls. In other words, reciting a corresponding passage of the Torah acts as a substitute for the act described in that passage — such as bringing a particular korban or, in this case, realizing the punishments recorded as curses.

The message here is crucial. This Shabbat, during the Torah-reading, each and every one of us is obligated to focus with extreme reverence and yirat-shamayim. By having in mind that the recitation of the passage of the Tochachah should act as a substitute for our having actually received the punishments described therein, we hope to fulfill the dictum of "let the year end along with its curses." By having received our just punishments, we can merit having a blessed Shavuos with respect to the anticipated fruits of the trees.

Tosafos (ibid.) explain the rationale behind the accepted practice of reading parshas Bamidbar as a buffer between parshas Bechukosai and Shavuos and similarly reading parshas Nitzavim as a buffer between parshas Ki Savo and Rosh HaShanah: "לפי שאנו רוצים להפסיק ולקרות שבת אחת קודם ראש השנה, על ש Üniversית תמים, והסמכהNous, מремדים שלף ממרים פרשות, потому זה הוא קוריא בתמריד שלפראס בנייה. פרשות שלף ממרים פרשות, כך נמצאת נאות ע記錄 בעיתון- because we wish to interrupt and have a Shabbat prior to Rosh HaShanah on which we read a portion not mentioning curses at all; so that the curses are not juxtaposed to Rosh HaShanah. And it is for this reason that we read parshas Bamidbar prior to Atzeres (Shavuos); so as not to juxtapose the curses in parshas Bechukosai with Atzeres.

Let us add a pleasant insight regarding HKB”H’s choice to open this week’s parsha with the passuk: ‘If You Live by My Precepts’ Means that You Should Labor in Torah-study

The Amazing Connection between: “I labored and I found’—you should believe” and: “They should request mercy from He Who possesses chochmah”
If you follow My decrees and observe My commandments and perform them; then I will provide your rains in their time, and the land will give its produce and the tree of the field will yield its fruit. Rashi comments: “If you will follow My decrees”—one could construe that this refers to the fulfillment of mitzvos, yet the fulfillment of mitzvos is the next thing stated in the passuk; so what does “if you follow my decrees” refer to? It implies that you should occupy yourselves in laborious Torah-study.

We can suggest that HKB”H knew that Ezra HaSofer was destined to institute this practice for the benefit of Yisrael: the reading of this portion prior to the holiday of Shavuos, which is the Rosh HaShanah for the fruits of the tree, so that “the past year should end along with its curses.” Now, we know that the holiday of Shavuos is also known as “יום מצה ותורתו”—“the day of the giving of our Torah”; therefore, HKB”H chose to begin this parsha with the passuk: “ואתה שמים gemachtת התורה”—encouraging us to occupy ourselves in laborious study of the Torah, which HKB”H gave us on the holiday of Shavuos. Then, the passuk continues: “ detta מתנית thầy האליך וביתו סופר”—then I will provide your rains in their time, and the land will give its produce and the tree of the field will yield its fruit.

The Forty-nine Days of the Sefirah Correspond to the Forty-nine Kelalos in Parshas Bechukosai

I was struck by an intriguing idea as to why HKB”H provided us with the forty-nine days of the “sefirah” prior to giving us the Torah annually on Shavuos. First, however, let us address the matter of the curses—the “Kelalos.” In parshas Bechukosai, HKB”H describes the punishment awaiting a person who transgresses all the teachings of the Torah; He enumerates forty-nine “Kelalos,” specifically. This contrasts with the ninety-eight “Kelalos” listed in parshas Ki Savo—which according to the Gemara (Megillas 31b), Moshe uttered of his own accord via ruach hakodesh—as explained by Tosafos there.

Let us suggest an explanation based on what we have learned in the Gemara (R.H. 21b): “חמישים שערי בינה נבראו בעולם, וכולן ניתנו למשה—but אומרים לתoro בביאה ובסופר—fifty levels of “binah” were created in the universe, and they were all bestowed upon Moshe except for one, as it is stated (Tehillim 8, 6): “Yet You have made him only a little less than the divine.” According to this passage, we learn that even Moshe Rabeinu, the foremost of all the prophets, was only able to perceive and ascertain forty-nine of the fifty levels of “binah.” Now, we are familiar with the statement from the wisest of men (Kohelet 7, 14): “ראתה את זה畸形 זה עשה האל—the Almighty created the world with equal and opposite counterparts. Hence, we can deduce that just as forty-nine levels of “binah” exist on the side of kedushah; similarly, forty-nine levels of tumah exist correspondingly. These forces of tumah are aimed at persuading a person to transgress the teachings of the Torah, which consist of forty-nine levels of kedushah.

Now, the Zohar hakadosh (Terumah 150b) teaches us that the fire of Gehinom stems from the fire and enthusiasm generated by a person when he commits “aveiros.” Here is a Hebrew translation of the passage in the Zohar: "אמר רבי יהודה, הדין של איבר הוא, כי מהעבירה עצמה יולד דבר רע הוא עצמו העוון שעשה ובידו."—G-d has made the one as well as the other—in other words, the Almighty created the world with equal and opposite counterparts. Hence, we can deduce that just as forty-nine levels of “binah” exist on the side of kedushah; similarly, forty-nine levels of tumah exist correspondingly. These forces of tumah are aimed at persuading a person to transgress the teachings of the Torah, which consist of forty-nine levels of kedushah.

We learn in the Mishnah (Avos Chapter 4): “A person who performs a single mitzvah acquires a single advocate for himself; one who commits an ‘aveirah’ acquires a single prosecutor for himself.” This can be understood based on the words of the Zohar hakadosh and the interpretation of the Arizal. For, the “aveirah” itself generates negative consequences.

Based on what we have learned, we can better understand the matter of the forty-nine “Kelalos” mentioned in this week’s parsha, which await a person who transgresses all the teachings.
and labor in the study of Torah. He followed the misguided advice of the forty-nine forces of tumah, which encouraged him to transgress the teachings of the Torah, which are comprised of forty-nine levels of “binah.” As a consequence, forty-nine prosecutorial forces were generated, taking him to task for his wrongdoings. Therefore, HKB”H delivers this sinner into their hands of tumah in the form of the forty-nine “Kelalos” mentioned in parshas Bechukosai.

We can now better appreciate why HKB”H gave us the forty-nine days of “sefiras haomer” prior to receiving the Torah on Shavuos. For, the Zohar hakadosh (Emor 97a) explains that the days of the “sefirah” are days of “taharah”—purification. During this period of time we purify ourselves in anticipation of receiving the Torah on Shavuos. This notion is reflected by the formula recited after the counting of the omer: “ויִדְרָה עִלָּה, וְיִתַּקְנוּ מִצְוֹתֵיהֶן, וַיִּתֶּן צְרָךְ וְלַעַל מִלָּה בְּמֶשֶּחָה”—we will merit arriving at Shavuos free of any flaws and impurities, worthy and ready to receive the Torah. Seeing as “curses”—we will merit arriving at Shavuos free of any flaws and impurities, worthy and ready to receive the Torah.

Carry out My “mishpatim” and observe My “chukim” to follow them; I am Hashem. There Rashi comments:

“את משפטי תעשו ואת חוקותי תשמרו ללכת בהם”—Carry out My ‘mishpatim’ and observe My ‘chukim’ to follow them; I am Hashem. Why does HKB”H only mention the “chukim”—whose rationales are not apparent—while omitting any mention of the “mishpatim”—whose rationales are apparent? This led our blessed sages to conclude that the words: “ אם בחוקותי תלכו ואת מצוותי תשמרו”—If you follow My decrees and observe My commandments and perform them; then I will provide your rains in their time, and the land will give its produce and the tree of the field will yield its fruit. We already presented Rashi’s comment: “If you follow My decrees”—one could construe that this refers to the fulfillment of mitzvos, yet the fulfillment of mitzvos is the next thing stated in the passuk; so what does “if you follow my decrees” refer to? It implies that you should occupy yourselves in laborious Torah-study.

This deserves further explanation. Clearly, “אם בחוקותי תלכו ואת מצוותי תשמרו” cannot be interpreted as referring to the performance of the mitzvos. Nevertheless, how do they derive that it implies: “אני ה’”—laboring in the study of Torah? Maybe it simply implies that we should engage in Torah-study even without laboring and exerting ourselves. It appears that we can explain the matter based on the well-known principle concerning the distinction between “mishpatim” and “chukim.” The term “misión” refers to mitzvos that are logical and sensible; whereas the term “chukim” refers to mitzvos that are beyond simple human comprehension. The source for this distinction is found in parshas Acharei (Vayikra 18, 4):

“את משפטי תעשו, אלו דברים האמורים בתורה במשפט, שאילו לא נאמרו היו כדאי לאומרן. ואת חוקותי תשמרו,国王, concerning which the yetzer hara reacts by inquiring why we should observe them. Likewise, the nations of the world, those who worship idols, react concerning them. For example, the eating of pork, the wearing of “shaatnez” and the purification of the waters of the sprinkling. Therefore, the passuk concludes: “I am Hashem”—implying that My decree is upon you; you are not allowed to exempt yourselves from it.

From Where Did They Derive that It Is Essential to Labor in the Study of Torah

In this week’s parsha we read: “אם בחוקותי תלכו ואת מצוותי תשמרו”—If you follow My decrees and observe My commandments and perform them; then I will provide your rains in their time, and the land will give its produce and the tree of the field will yield its fruit. We already presented Rashi’s comment: “If you will follow My decrees”—one could construe that this refers to the fulfillment of mitzvos, yet the fulfillment of mitzvos is the next thing stated in the passuk; so what
Rabbi Yehoshua’s lesson is quite clear. In order to attain the crown of the Torah, two criteria are necessary. On the one hand, it is necessary to labor in the study of Torah: “He should spend more time in a yeshivah and spend less time in business.” In addition, however: “They should plead for mercy from Him to whom “chochmah” belongs”; it is necessary to plead for mercy from HKB”H that He should influence a person with the wisdom of His Torah.

We find a similar message in the Gemara (Berachos 8a) expounding on the passuk (Tehillim 32, 6): “על ذات המחלס هل愎 אלהים לענה – י(Editor) יבמה אומנות וברחמים. שמא משלו (משלי ב-ו) כי ליה님 למדני ענוה – י(Editor) יבמה אומנות וברחמים ומאי. Regarding this let every devout man pray to You, at a time, a finding.” . . . Rabbi Natan says: “At the time, a finding” refers to the study of Torah, as it is stated: “for he who finds me finds life, etc.” Thus, we find it stated explicitly that it is necessary to pray for Torah. With this in mind, we can appreciate the formula instituted in the Shemoneh Esreh: “א citt Goa לאלה רעה ממלדים לאומנוバル. י(Editor) יבמה אומנות וברחמים — You favor a person with knowledge and teach mankind understanding. This berachah specifically addresses the acquisition of Torah-knowledge. This point is emphasized by a comment found in Rashi (A.Z. 8a): “א citt Goa לאלה רעה ממלדים לאומنوバル. י(Editor) יבמה אומנות וברחמים — if a person should forget what he has learned, he should focus at length on the berachah of “You favor a person with knowledge and teach mankind understanding.”

An allusion to this message can be found in the words of the wisest of all men (Kohelet 4, 9): “טובים השנים מן האחד אשר יש להם. י(Editor) יבמה אומנות וברחמים — two are better than one, for they get a better return for their labor.” In other words, “תומי השם מפי האוסר זכרו — Better return for their labor.”

What should a person do to become wise? He answered them: He should spend more time in a yeshivah and spend less time in business. They responded: But many have done so and yet this has not helped them. He said to them: They should plead for mercy from Him to whom wisdom (“chochmah”) belongs, as it states: “For Hashem grants wisdom; from His mouth comes wisdom and understanding.” Rabbi Chiya taught a Baraisa: This is analogous to a king who held a banquet for his servants and sends to his friends whatever is before him. What is Rabbi Yehoshua teaching us? [Rashi explains: Why does Rabbi Yehoshua say that it is necessary to spend more time studying in a yeshivah if the matter ultimately depends on divine mercy?]

A Wonderful Explanation regarding the Berachos of the Torah from the Great Rabbi Yosef of Slutzk, ztz”l

This concept is applied by the great, genius, Rabbi Yosef of Slutzk, ztz”l [one of the preeminent students of Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin, ztz”l] in Derashot Rabeinu Yosef of Slutzk (Drush for Simchas Torah). He provides a magnificent explanation for the order of the formula of the berachot of the Torah instituted by our blessed sages. Initially, we recite: “א citt Goa לאלה רעה ממלדים לאומנוバル —Who sanctified us with His mitzvos and
commanded us to engage in words of Torah. As to why the formula employs the term "לברוחך" (to engage in) rather than "ל.fromString()" (to study), let us refer to the Turei Zahav (47, 1). He explains that it is essential to study specifically in the form of dialectic and labor characteristic of business transactions and negotiations. For, as we know, Torah is only retained by one who is willing to sacrifice himself on its behalf.

Yet, since in addition to laboring and expending effort in the study of Torah, it is essential to also pray to Hashem, as we learned from Rabbi Yehoshua above: "בקח את התורה המחרפת הזמנך"; therefore, a special berachah was instituted to the One to Whom chochmah belongs regarding the attainment and sweetness of the Torah: "והארב בא את בחוץ התורה ילמדו淺די במתכינו". If a person claims: "I labored and I did not succeed," then why do we not believe him? It is quite possible that he did indeed exert himself in the study of Torah, but did not achieve the desired goal, because he neglected to seek mercy.

Before presenting the Nezer HaKodesh’s answer, it is fitting that we present the incredible words of the Ktav Sofer in his Responsa (O.C. end of 18). From his response, a definitive answer to this question is apparent. He scrutinizes the interchange between the men of Alexandria and Rabbi Yehoshua described in the Gemara: "אמרו ליהוות Eld Tova מברך עמל ועמר研发中心, He could have very easily combined both answers into one. The Ktav Sofer provides a reasonable answer based on what we have learned in the Gemara (Megillah 6b):

"לברוחך נאמר espect נאמר espect בקם נאמר espect,iena espect נאמר espect אולא espect מכמה espect אולא espect רשע espect הנוגה espect אולא espect רשע espect,nu espect רשות espect על espect נאמר espect אולא espect

The matter of whether or not to believe a person’s claim with regards to whether or not he labored and succeeded only applies to “divrei-Torah.” Regarding business transactions, divine assistance is necessary. And even regarding “divrei-Torah,” this rule-of-thumb only applies to fine-tuning one’s viewpoint and understanding; however, to reach a definitive conclusion requires divine assistance.

Regarding the very last part of this quote, Rashi comments: "דרsomא—so that it will not be forgotten from him; דברי התורה—In matters that require divine assistance, there are those who labor and do not succeed. Other Rishonim, however, explain that "דרsomא" refers to arriving at the correct halachic decision based on the teachings of the Torah. In fact, both explanations are correct. For, "דרsomא—divine assistance—is necessary to prevent a person from forgetting what he has learned; and, as a result of his not forgetting, he will succeed at reaching the correct halachic conclusion.

This helps explain very nicely Rabbi Yehoshua’s initial response to the men of Alexandria: "אמרו ליהוות Eld Tova מברך עמל ועמר研发中心, Since they simply asked what a person should do to acquire the chochmah of the Torah; he replied that they should labor in the study of the Torah—spending more time in the yeshivah and
less time occupied with financial and commercial concerns. This coincides with the dictum: "עֲנִיִּיתָ לֵךְ מַעֲצָתָה אָנֹךָ"—if a person claims that he labored and yet did not succeed, do not believe him.

Therefore, they inquired further: "אמר כי הראית לך כל אלה המשפט". In other words, many did as you advise; their efforts enabled them to find explicit answers to their queries; however, their efforts did not help them retain this acquired knowledge and arrive at a correct halachic decision. Addressing this matter, Rabbi Yehoshua replied: "אֵלָךָ פָּשַׁבוּ מְשַׁמֵּשׁ שְׁחָבֹעָה שָלָלָו"—to remember and to arrive at the correct halachic decision, a person must plead for divine mercy. This concludes his answer.

Rashi’s comment cited above seems to support this notion: "ואז הוא משמח הלומדים השאירים ביה"—according to Rashi, the prayer of "בְּרֵאשֵׁית הַדְּבָרִים" concerns the issue of forgetting the Torah one has learned. In any event, the Ksav Sofer has provided us with a definitive answer to the question posed by the Nezer HaKodesh. When they state: "עֲנִיִּיתָ לֵךְ מַעֲצָתָה אָנֹךָ"—this applies to finding the correct answer and clarification regarding the inquiry the person labored on. Yet, the statement: "בְּכֵשֵׁת רֹחֲבָה מְשַׁמֵּשׁ שֶׁהָבָא"—divine assistance and mercy are required to retain one’s knowledge and to arrive at the correct Torah-based, halachic decision.

"עֲנִיִּיתָ לֵךְ מַעֲצָתָה" Applies to the Revealed Torah
"בְּכֵשֵׁת רֹחֲבָה" Applies to the Hidden Torah

We can now present the magnificent solution of the Nezer HaKodesh. He reconciles the apparent contradiction between the statement: "עֲנִיִּיתָ לֵךְ מַעֲצָתָה אָנֹךָ" and Rabbi Yehoshua’s response: "בְּכֵשֵׁת רֹחֲבָה מְשַׁמֵּשׁ שֶׁהָבָא"—that in addition to laboring in Torah-study, it is also necessary to pray for G-d’s assistance. He refers to the Midrash (S.R. 28, 1) concerning the passuk related to Matan Torah (Shemos 19, 3):

"וַיִּשָּׁן עַל אֶפְרָיָא. וְזָהָה אָחָד לְפָרָא לִבְּשָׁת שָׁלְחָן... שָׁלַח שָׁלַח אֲשֶׁר בָּא לְפָרָא לִבְּשָׁת"—it is referring to the revealed part of the Torah originating in the third located between HK”B”H and Moshe. Accessing this part of the Torah depends on man’s efforts. Rabbi Yehoshua’s statement: "בְּכֵשֵׁת רֹחֲבָה מְשַׁמֵּשׁ שֶׁהָבָא"—refers to the concealed part of the Torah, originating in the third located in HK”B”H’s hands. Achieving this level of Torah-knowledge is not dependant on man’s efforts alone; collaboration with tefilah is also required. Emphasizing this point, Rabbi Yehoshua informed the men of Alexandria: "בְּכֵשֵׁת רֹחֲבָה מְשַׁמֵּשׁ שֶׁהָבָא"—this demands HK”B”H’s assistance and mercy. For, this type of "chochmah" resides in the upper third, the domain of HK”B”H.

The Nezer HaKodesh finds this Midrash puzzling (B.R. 1, 1):

This is astonishing! Why did HK”B”H create the "luchos" with these precise dimensions—so that one third would be in His hand, one third in Moshe’s hand and one third in the middle? This was certainly not a mere coincidence! Therefore, he concludes that the "luchos"—the root and basis of the entire Torah—were indeed comprised of three separate parts.

The lower third which Moshe Rabeinu grasped was the revealed part of Torah she’b’chavev—the simple, straightforward understanding of the Torah available to everyone. The upper third which HK”B”H grasped contained the secret, mystical aspects of the Torah; they are not accessible to everyone; instead, they remain in Hashem’s hands; the Almighty decides benevolently to share this portion with those who are worthy, the spiritual elite, as it is written (Tehillim 25, 14): "רְאוּ לָא לַשָּׁם וְלָא לַיָּדוֹ"—the secret of Hashem is revealed to those who fear Him, and His covenant to inform them.

The middle third, on the other hand, lies between HK”B”H’s hand and Moshe’s. This portion represents the area of Torah she’b’al peh characterized by extensive debate concerning matters of Torah and deeper study and analysis. This portion of the Torah is not as accessible to everyone as Torah she’b’chavev; it is also not concealed and stored away solely in the hands of Hashem, like the mystical aspects of the Torah. Rather, it represents an intermediate status between the two extremes—between Torah she’b’chavev in Moshe’s hands and the mystical Torah in HK”B”H’s hands. For, by virtue of hard work and effort, man can access this part of the Torah.

In this manner, the Nezer HaKodesh provides a reasonable solution to the apparent contradiction. When the Gemara states: "עֲנִיִּיתָ לֵךְ מַעֲצָתָה אָנֹךָ"—it is referring to the revealed part of the Torah originating in the third located between HK”B”H and Moshe. Accessing this part of the Torah depends on man’s efforts. Rabbi Yehoshua’s statement: "בְּכֵשֵׁת רֹחֲבָה מְשַׁמֵּשׁ שֶׁהָבָא"—refers to the concealed part of the Torah, originating in the third located in HK”B”H’s hands. Achieving this level of Torah-knowledge is not dependant on man’s efforts alone; collaboration with tefilah is also required. Emphasizing this point, Rabbi Yehoshua informed the men of Alexandria: "בְּכֵשֵׁת רֹחֲבָה מְשַׁמֵּשׁ שֶׁהָבָא"—this demands HK”B”H’s assistance and mercy. For, this type of "chochmah" resides in the upper third, the domain of HK”B”H.

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