

PARSHAT BEHAR-BECHUKOTAI
LEVITICUS 25:1-27:34
HAFTARAH JEREMIAH 16:19-17:14
24 IYYAR 5785/22 MAY 2025



Joy, in spite of everything
Oil on canvass by Julia Meyerowitz-Katz

CONTINUOUS ACTS OF BEGINNING

1. **אם-בְּהַקְתִּי תִלְכוּ וְאֶת-מִצְוֹתַי תִּשְׁמְרוּ וְעִשִּׂיתֶם אֹתָם** (Leviticus 26:3)
If you follow My laws [lit., “If you walk in My ways”) and faithfully observe [lit., “listen to”] My commandments and do them...
2. **וְאִם-בְּזֹאת לֹא תִשְׁמְעוּ לִי נִהְלַכְתֶּם עִמִּי בְקָרִי** (Leviticus 26:27)
But if, despite this, you disobey Me and remain hostile to me...
קָרָה - v., encounter, meet, befall; קָרָה - n., chance, accident; קָרִי - n., contrariness
3. **כִּי-יִקְרִיב מִכֶּם קָרְבָּן** (Leviticus 1:2)
“When any of you presents an offering to God [of cattle]...
4. Each of us has two souls: the Godly soul and the animal soul (*nefesh ha-behamit*). The essential purpose of our lives is to enable the Godly soul to prevail over the tendencies of the animal soul. Even the animal soul shares in a love of God. “When a human being from

among you will bring...” The syntax reveals a deeper meaning: “When a human being will bring from among you...” And what is the offering we are to bring? It is from our animal soul. (Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi)

5. I will give peace in the land, and you shall lie down and none shall make you afraid, and I will cause evil beasts to cease to exist (*hishbati*) from the land... (Leviticus 26:3-6)
6. Rav Yehuda explains that *hishbati* means that God will cause these evil beasts to disappear. However, Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai interprets that only the evil of the beasts will cease from the land; the beasts themselves will not be destroyed. (Midrash, Sifra)
Rabbi Shimon says: “What better shows the greatness of the Almighty: when there are no dangerous animals, or when the animals exist but they pose no threat? The answer is the latter, as it is written: ‘And a wolf will live with a lamb, and a lion will lie with a calf’ (Isaiah 11:6).” (Midrash, Sifra)
7. A beginning is ultimately an invitation to open toward the gifts and growth that are stored up for us. To refuse to begin can be an act of great self-neglect...Our very life here depends directly on continuous acts of beginning. (John O’Donohue, *To Bless the Space Between Us: A Book of Blessings*)

In out-of-the-way places of the heart,
Where your thoughts never think to wander,
This beginning has been quietly forming,
Waiting until you were ready to emerge.

For a long time it has watched your desire,
Feeling the emptiness growing inside you,
Noticing how you willed yourself on,
Still unable to leave what you had outgrown.

....

Though your destination is not yet clear
You can trust the promise of this opening;
Unfurl yourself into the grace of beginning
That is at one with your life's desire.

Awaken your spirit to adventure;
Hold nothing back, learn to find ease in risk;
Soon you will be home in a new rhythm,
For your soul senses the world that awaits you.

(John O’Donohue, “For A New Beginning”)