

# D'var Torah: Behar-Behukotai

I sat down with a man a few weeks ago. He's a smart, ambitious man with a solid business, and he started talking to me about a major construction project which has been in the midst of some major controversy. I'm going to talk about this project, but I want to be clear that I am not endorsing any side, for or against it.

This project is the Rosemont Mine. A job creating, mountain moving, material sourcing, water scourging project. I knew that to speak ill of this project would grate against him, just as he knew that speaking ill of something I cared about would grate against me. There are major concerns, though, and some of them relate directly to this *parashah*.

The copper mine I mentioned is promised to use cutting edge technology to use less water and reclaim much of what is used. Arizona has a spotty history of making companies follow through on similar promises, and if they continue that track record, we can expect some problems. However, if they are adhered to, we may have a boon to our local economy at the expense of some gorgeous mountains. Is the tradeoff and risk worth it? I don't know.

In the very beginning of *Behar* we read that land must lie fallow every seventh year, and it's easy to see the establishment of highly practical crop rotation here. But if you continue to verse 23, past all the parts about vegetation, you'll read "But the land must not be sold beyond reclaim, for the land is Mine; you are but strangers resident with Me."

Sadly much of what we have done to our land is beyond reclaim, whether it's been sold to utility companies or altered permanently. As California has mandatory water restrictions already in place, Arizona is gearing up for drought conditions that could be far, far worse.

Lake Mead, once this country's largest reservoir, stores most of the water for the Colorado River. It's lowest level has never dipped below 1,080 feet above sea level since the 1930's, until two weeks ago, when it dropped just below that.

When January 1st comes around next year, if the level of Lake Mead is below 1,075 feet above sea level, there will be extreme water cuts to Arizona's portion of that reservoir. According to the US Bureau of Reclamation, there's a 33% chance of that happening this year, but a 75% chance of that happening by 2017.

This terrifies me because in our thirst for growth we are told in verse 17 not to wrong one another when selling land and what we claim from it. While wronging one another traditionally applies to just us Jews, I feel we should broaden the restriction to anyone. And us in the US tend to have a pretty interesting history of wronging each other when it comes to land rights. Whether it was the ousting and slaughter of indigenous populations to get their fertile land, then giving them the worst leftovers we were willing to part with. Whether it was supporting shady oil barons who smooth talked their way into purchasing huge swaths of land, then poisoning it and the surrounding area. Whether it is giant energy conglomerates that shoot pressurized chemicals into underground crevices to extract natural gas and, in the process, poison people's water supplies.

If you continue to *Behukotai*, Chapter 26 in Leviticus, verses 18-20, you'll see where we're headed, and it's not pretty. It reads "And if, for all that, you do not obey Me, I will go on to discipline you sevenfold for your sins, and I will break your proud glory. I will make your skies like iron and your earth like copper, so that your strength shall be spent to no purpose. Your land shall not yield its produce, nor shall the trees of the land yield their fruit."

We are seeing this. We are seeing skies as dry as hot iron in

the sun. We are seeing land start to turn hard as we can't nurture it. We are seeing a proud industry start to crack. Many farmers are having to leave crops in their fields, when they can even grow them in the first place. That is the very dire warning laid out with "so that your strength shall be spent to no purpose."

So what am I saying?

We have a delicate world, and we've already dealt many blows to it. We've reduced big fish populations down to paltry numbers, we've made our oceans more acidic, we've stripped people and land of valuable resources. One of the main things Hashem wants us to do to honor Him is to treat each other, whether they're our compatriots or our hired help, but especially if they're a stranger, with respect.

Perhaps if we make a habit of dealing with others respectfully and without underhanded business motives, when we are faced with what NASA is calling a "megadrought", we'll weather it better.

I pray that as we pray for rain in Israel, we also receive it here and that we may make a world of peace between us and our land and us and each other. Shabbat shalom.

---

## **Benchcraft Company**

[Benchcraft Company](#).

The company that called me during a moment of weakness. That made me realize I *really* must stop taking people, especially those I don't know, at their word. The company that lied to me so many times over the course of a few hours spread apart over

a few days that it seems downright sociopathic.

First, what they do. They sell golf course advertising. In and of itself, it seems a great idea. It's a passive advertising campaign into a demographic that fits exactly what I (and most other insurance agents) drool over: affluent, with some extra time, often with expanding families. There are a few problems with it, though, mainly that it's completely passive and you're putting yourself in front of them when they're spending hours in the sun, possibly drinking, and just having a good time with friends. It leaves you pretty darn forgettable when you're one passive sign among 17 others.

After the call I did about 45 minutes of cursory research, found the usual complaints you can find about any large company, and saw that they actually did what they did quite well.

So, I signed up for these guys during a moment of weakness. I was feeling down, looking for something new, and got a call out of the blue. Of course it was a hard sale, of course I shouldn't have taken the guy at his word, and of course I should have known all the tricks. But I *wanted* and *needed* to believe. I needed something new.

I immediately felt a pang of regret. Two hours later, I had all the information to know that I really screwed the pooch on this.

Yes, I should have done more research; yes, I should have been more skeptical. We all have our moments of weakness, though.

I called back to cancel. They told me the contracts are non-cancelable and, indeed, the text as such was hiding in plain sight (fun fact: when you surround a paragraph with bullet points, people tend not to read the paragraph – look it up!). I escalated it up the chain of command and ended up leaving a voicemail for their head of sales guy. I wonder if he has consciously learned yet that that hard sales lead to hard

cancels. Surely he knows it in his subconscious mind by now.

Once he got back to me is when the abuse started. He immediately tried to tell me that all I had was buyer's remorse. Of course I had buyer's remorse! I couldn't simply say that, though, as his tone and context used it dismissively to belittle me. He was trying to diminish it into a small overcomable objection, like the kind of buyer's remorse one gets after buying the \$40 headset when you meant to get the \$20 one.

We debated back and forth, I told him what I needed him to do, he said "I'm the guy you need to befriend to get anything done, so you shouldn't tell me what 'you need me to do.'"

Gotcha, you're insecure. You can do everything I'm asking, but you have to put up a front and make it difficult. I referenced their Yelp and other industry reviews to bolster my case, he told me those reviews didn't matter, which I found to be amusing.

Eventually, I told him I signed that contract under duress and, if they didn't cancel it, I'd be pursuing "other avenues of restitution."

He eventually acquiesced, but since reviews from other people said they were promised refunds that never came, I managed to not only get an email confirmation of the promised refund, but recorded (legally) the last part of the conversation.

The final part of the conversation:

Sales lead: ...It's just me having a conversation with you to get to the root of what your real issue is and overcoming that.

Me: The root of my issue is that I feel like I made a rash decision with my money and I need to have it back.

Lead: Okay, so I can't do that. However, if it makes more sense and you can at least see it as a meeting of the minds and that I'm willing to take a step toward you. We don't make

money on first year advertising, even when they pay in full we don't make money. We're a renewal business, like trailers in your business, right [note: trailers are something to insure when you park them or hitch them up, not residual income]? Imagine you didn't get money up front, but on that 13th month you got paid...

Me: I get both renewals and up front commission, so that's completely not analogous... (yes, I know where he was going, but in a power play you can't acquiesce)

Lead: I understand that, I'm just drawing a parallel so you can imagine we don't make money off of first year advertisers. So, my suggestion...

Me: I haven't even submitted anything yet, so there isn't even any money to lose.

Lead: There is, but once again I won't tell you, even though I know the industry you're in, how your business model works, but ours the majority of our costs are up front which means the day you agreed to the ad the salesman got his bonus immediately [95% chance a lie, from industry insiders], the retainer fee on our artists got her money, or him, there's 22 of them back there. So you're accountable to find someone that got compensated immediately. Why do we compensate them for artwork they haven't touched yet? Because they need to push out a hundred pieces of artwork a day to keep up with the amount of volume of business we do [1. Then why is my tiny, single account so vital to you? 2. Ha! Phrasing it like that makes it sound like each of those 22 people has to push 100 pieces of art copy daily. I call shenanigans.]. Alright, so you pay them upfront and have a certain deadline to get it done. Which means they're also reaching out to you saying "Hey, Eddie, I need a business card, man, let's do this". So that you feel good about the fact that the artist wants to complete your artwork. Okay?

We don't make money [Seriously, again with the first-year-woes?] the first year; we break even. You renew your ad with us, bang immediately we turn a profit, and this case, what I would suggest, because I know it's money and it's just buyer's

remorse, in reality, is let me take the loss on the first advertisement you have with us. I'll write off the balance you owe, you'll still get the ad...

Me: I need that \$200 back.

Lead: Okay, well I can't return that to you, I apologize.

Me: I need that \$200 back. I'm not getting off the phone until I get confirmation I'm getting that \$200 back.

Lead: M'kay. I'm not gonna sit here in silence with ya...

Me: So I'm going to be...we're either going to have this amicably resolved, like this, or I can start a social media campaign, I can...

Lead: A social media campaign?...

Me: I'm talking right now, k? I can go onto Facebook, I can go onto industry websites (lead attempts to talk over me)... I can go onto industry websites. I can file with the BBB, I can file with Yelp, I can file with glassdoor, I can talk about this on insurance specific forums, I can talk about this on other industry specific forums.

Lead: You should spend that time making money, Eddie [what should have been a 30 minute call to recoup \$200 and venting with other agents about terrible vendors is kind of non-analogous].

Me: I can also call up El Dorado [the golf course my sign was supposed to be at] and tell them that this company has led me astray. I can...

Lead: Here's what I'm going to do. I'm going to go ahead and call the golf course right now and I'm going to send them a copy of the contract that you agreed to, okay? And I'm going to send them your response, okay? And this buyer's remorse is what you got two hours later you got our request, they know our policies. Um, so I guess you're going to want to do a campaign against the golf course, too, at that point?

Me: I honestly don't care about the golf course. I'm simply...

Lead: I'm just trying to help you to not waste your time. I'll send them the info for you.

Me: So, you are not going to help me out at all about this, are you?

Lead: Um, I'm trying to be rational. I offered to take a loss on your account and...

Me: That loss will not equal the loss I'm having right now [That's right, sales lead, I can interrupt like a jerk, too]. You need to refund that money...

Lead: You're having a loss because you're having money issues [He said this because I split up the payment, half on the business credit card – for the protections they offer – and half on the business debit card]. But you want to blame us for that. You want me to take a full loss on the account because you have buyer's remorse.

Me: I've taken plenty of full losses on people who have had Geico come back to them and rewrite them as a new client, so that's just the nature of the game. So, I need you to take a loss on this and refund this money.

Lead: Alright, I'm going to go get the sales rep, okay? Because he's gonna eventually basically gonna have to pay for the ad...

Me: That's fine [Seriously, it was fine, I don't mind telling someone why I'm canceling. That's just professionalism, instead of ad hominem attacks.]

Lead: I want *you* to tell *him* that you don't care that, that he has to take food off his table.

Me: Okay, so you're basically...you want me to tell him that I'm not willing to give up food off my table...

Lead: [Again, with the interrupting!] What's his name, Riley? I want you just say "Hey, Riley, I'm sorry, I have buyer's remorse, I understand that it's company policy there. Um, there, I'm wanting to overturn that company policy which I understand is going to make you pay for the ad and when that happens..."

Me: There's not even going to be an ad! There's not even going to be an ad.

Lead: Eddie, I'm trying to explain this to you and, for some reason, I feel like you're either just not listening because you just want your money back or you're not listening because I'm not communicating properly to you and, if that's the case

then I'll take responsibility. [I'm listening to you say irrelevant things and try to sidestep around your idiotic company policy.] What I'm saying is there is money that is spent already [really, after 24 hours?]. When I go get the rep and make him come in here and talk to you, it's just so...so...so when he says "Why are you making me pay for this?" he doesn't think I'm the prick. Because...

Me: Alright. Bring him in. If you're telling me to apologize that he's paying for the ad when, in reality, there's not even an ad going up.

Lead: Okay, well he's paying for what you paid that you're getting back, or are attempting to get back. [Wait, what?]

Me: Alright.

[Pause]

Lead: What are you going to say: "Sorry, man, I changed my mind," "Sorry I cost you \$395,"?

Me: Bring him in. I'll tell him that. [I honestly didn't mind taking the personal hit. It's called being courteous and professional, plus it would have made his work environment easier].

[Long pause]

Lead: Wow. You know what, Eddie? I'm going to give you your money back. Um, and I'm gonna do everything I can right now not to insult you [really, after you insinuated that I was a prick, A+ job]. Um, but, like I said people do funny things when they're broke, I get that, k? I'm gonna give you your money back (goes into the specifics of the refund). I'm not surprised that money's an issue [Oh? I have a scratch insurance agency just on the cusp of starting its second year. Things are notoriously tight for the first two-three years of an agency's growth, so your attempts at making me feel crappy are falling on unsympathetic ears.] but we don't want your business. [That was made abundantly clear when you first treated me like garbage.].

Me: Alright.

Lead: You'll sleep well tonight, I'm sure...

Me: I will sleep great, I will sleep...

Lead: ...it's not gonna affect you at all...

Me: ...wonderfully next to my wife and dog...

Lead: ...and you'll probably rip someone off tomorrow, too. I'm going to refund your money.

Me: When can I expect to see that?

Lead: It'll be done sometime this week, it won't post to your account immediately, so give it time to actually get into your account, okay?

Me: Alright, so I can expect to see it by the end of the week?

Lead: No, you can expect to have us press the refund button by the end of the week. I don't know when it's gonna show up into your account. I can't control the banking system. But...

Me: Okay.

Lead: ...if you call them, I'm sure can tell them about your social media campaign and maybe they'll be quicker. [Great callback! You should join an improv troupe.] In the meantime, I can only do what we can do, and that's pushing a button for you. Okay?

Me: Alright, I appreciate that. And I do hope that...

[Lead hangs up]

Here's the thing. If they had refunded my money and said "No problem, let's talk in the future," I would have definitely talked with them in a year or two. Since they were such jerks, I won't ever talk with them again.

For the record, they sat on "pushing the button" for a full 10 days. That's two business weeks, and decidedly longer than "by the end of the week" that they had promised.