BS"D
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Friday, 19 Iyar, is the 34th Day of the Omer

Potomac Torah Study Center
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NOTE: Devrei Torah presented weekly in Loving Memory of Rabbi Leonard S. Cahan z"l, Rabbi Emeritus of Congregation Har Shalom, who started me on my road to learning 50 years ago and was our family Rebbe and close friend until his untimely death.

Devrei Torah are now Available for Download (normally by noon on Fridays) from www.PotomacTorah.org. Thanks to Bill Landau for hosting the Devrei Torah archives.

Behar focuses on mitzvot concerning the land of Israel. Land ownership plays a significant role in economic development throughout the world, as one learns from studying economic history. In medieval England, serfs who worked for a land owner had the right to cultivate parts of the land for their own benefit. During the 13th and 14th centuries, land owners gained the legal right to enclose land and prevent serfs from using any of it for their own benefit. Land owners who put together large plots of land could use the land more productively. The result of foreclosure over a few centuries was greater output (and more rapid economic growth), but also more poverty for former serfs. In the United States, a policy of enabling citizens to acquire land in newly opened territories provided a method for people to work hard and gain wealth over time. The policies of land ownership, very different in England and the United States, both facilitated economic growth – but the system in the United States led to more income equality than that in England. This brief summary leaves out many details but ties land rights to economic development.

Land management in the Torah is very different, as we learn in Behar. When B'Nai Yisrael entered Israel, each tribe received a section of the land, and each family's section depended on the number of family members. The land ownership rights were permanent and lasted until the exiles and dispersion of ten of the tribes. Once these tribes were lost, there was no way to return to the holdings that Joshua originally set up.

The Torah set restrictions on changes in land ownership in Israel. Every seven years was a Shemittah year. During Shemittah, Jews could not plant, plow, or care for the crops on their land. Any crops that grew on their own were "hefker," or ownerless, available to anyone who wished to help himself to what he needed. God promised that every sixth year, He would send enough extra produce to last for the Shemittah year and for the following year (until the crop was ready to harvest in year eight). All personal debts would be cancelled on each Shemittah year, and all slaves would go free (unless they wished to stay). After seven Shemittah years, there was a Yovel, or Jubilee. During Yovel, all land would revert to the original owners, all debts would be cancelled, and all slaves would go free.

Shemittah and Yovel provided a balance to prevent bad economic fortune from creating a permanent debtor class. Every seven years, all Jews would receive a new beginning with debts wiped clean, and every fifty years, all Jews would receive their traditional land holdings. Loans would reflect the temporary nature of the payback period – the reality that a lender with three years to recover a loan would lend less and insist on a higher percentage payback per year than one with six years to repay.

The basis for the unusual system in Israel is that a person may not own the land in Israel – all the land belongs to Hashem. Behar teaches us that because God created all of us in His image, all Jews are part of our family. Loans to a fellow Jew in need must be without interest. If a Jew needs a home, we are to provide him with a home. We are to treat all Jews as part of our family. We see this belief looking at the situation in Ukraine. The Jews displaced and made poor in Ukraine are our brothers. Every Jewish organization immediately started collecting donations to help our brothers in and from Ukraine. The Jewish community responded in a similar way to help Jews caught in the former Soviet Union before its collapse and Jews who survived World War II and were able to move to Israel and America after the war. The Jews who left Europe and Moslem countries for Israel and the United States after World War II went for a fresh start – the

way that God intended after Shemittah and Yovel. Instead of the land that the families would have received during the period before the exiles, these Jews received help from the Jewish community. Many took their opportunities, worked hard, and made fresh starts toward better futures for themselves and for their children and grandchildren.

Shemittah and Yovel parallel our annual counting of the Omer. We count seven weeks and forty-nine days. The next day is Shavuot. We count seven Shemittah cycles, and the next year is Yovel. The connection between Shemittah and Yovel with the Omer and Shavuot connects land ownership with Har Sinai, the location of Aseret Dibrot, which Hashem presented to us on the same day as Shavuot. Moreover, the Torah tells us (next week) that ignoring Shemittah is sufficient for Hashem to vomit B'Nai Yisrael out of the land, and that any exile for ignoring Shemittah will last a year for every Shemittah that the Jews do not observe correctly.

My beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, always had a strong connection to Israel and to Jews in need anywhere. Rabbi Cahan's parents and his sister Naomi moved to Israel. Rabbi Cahan visited Israel frequently and brought back books and religious items that he made available to congregants at very favorable prices – in the days before the Internet. Rabbi Cahan always reminded us that all Jews are family and that we must help our family whenever they are in need (either expressed or not expressed). When I was growing up, we always had relatives and friends from out of town living with us, sometimes for extended periods. The times with fellow Jews joining our family tended to be the happiest times of my youth. This closeness is not nearly as common today as it was several decades ago – and the absence of company staying with us leaves a hole from enjoyable times in my past. Even so, hopefully my children and grandchildren will learn the lesson that fellow Jews are our family and that we owe it to ourselves and to them to help Jews in need whenever possible.

Much of the inspiration for my weekly Dvar Torah message comes from the insights of Rabbi David Fohrman and his team of scholars at www.alephbeta.org. Please join me in supporting this wonderful organization, which has increased its scholarly work during the pandemic, despite many of its supporters having to cut back on their donations.

Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Yehoshua Mayer HaLevi ben Nechama Zelda, Leib Dovid ben Etel, Mordechai ben Chaya, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Uzi Yehuda ben Mirda Behla, David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Eliav Yerachmiel ben Sara Dina, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha; Noa Shachar bat Avigael, Kayla bat Ester, and Malka bat Simcha, who need our prayers. Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

Shabbat Shalom,
Hannah & Alan

Dvar Torah: Behar: Gainless Cheating (5759)

by Rabbi Dovid Green

In this week's reading we are directed not to cheat in business. The Torah says explicitly "one should not overcharge his brethren" (Leviticus 25:14).

Being that the land of Israel was divided among tribes and again among the families making up the tribes, the intention is that each family has an ancestral right to the land it was given. In most cases even when land is sold, it is really a form of leasing, and the land goes back to its ancestral owner in the year known as Yoveil (Jubilee), which occurs every fifty years. The land is given a fair market value per year, and the buyer purchases the land on that basis. It is in this context that we are instructed not to overcharge.

In the Talmud (Tractate Tamid 28.a), there is a discussion as to which is a good general approach in life. One of the opinions is that one should embrace faith to an extreme. Rashi, the great medieval commentator, explains this statement as follows. One should do business faithfully, and not cheat people.

Rabbi Shalom Noach Brezovsky, the Slonimer Rebbe, points out that this explanation is difficult to understand. Doing business faithfully and not cheating is not one of several approaches, it is a directive explicit in the Torah. It also seems

redundant to say “do business faithfully” and also “don’t cheat people.” Not cheating is included in doing business faithfully.

The Slonimer Rebbe explains this in the following way. There are some character traits which are appropriate at times and inappropriate at other times. Jealousy, for instance, is appropriate if it motivates one to try harder and accomplish more good. It is inappropriate if it motivates someone to hatred and bitterness. Many traits have this in common. The two exceptions are the traits of truth and faith. Truth and faith are always appropriate in every situation.

The following is an example of truth. Rav Safra was reciting K’rias Sh’ma, part of the daily liturgy. Rav Safra was unable to interrupt his recitation when someone came to him and offered him a sum of money for an item he was selling. The lack of response was taken as a refusal of the offer, and the purchaser offered more. This repeated itself several times until Rav Safra was finished, and then Rav Safra told the man that he would accept his original offer, as he had accepted that price but could not say so before he had offered more. This can be what Rashi meant when he said not to cheat people. Even when he would be permitted by the Torah to charge a particular sum, but it involved even a slight dishonesty, such as the case with Rav Safra, one should still not “cheat.” One must strive for the most extreme degree of truth.

Regarding faith, the Slonimer Rebbe quotes a work called the Be’er Moshe. Sometimes a person might think that if he does a dishonest act in business he stands to gain a great profit. In reality it is determined by G-d what a person will make each year. Someone who embraces that knowledge seriously knows that “all of the kings of the east and the west could not add or subtract one iota from that which was decreed for this person to receive.” In that context cheating and dishonesty has no place. One can never ultimately obtain more than what is coming to him. This is the meaning of doing business faithfully.

The Slonimer Rebbe quotes one of his predecessors that the businessmen of his time were always in a state of fear that their buyers would not be repeat customers and they would lose business to their competition. About that the previous Rebbe said that it was already decreed in heaven when the buyers left their villages which merchant they would go to, and how much he would spend, and that the merchants really had nothing to be worrying about. This is the approach of faith, and with this approach honest business practices are the only way of going about things.

Accordingly, doing business faithfully, and not cheating people are not just laws we must follow; they are an approach to life based on a perspective which embraces honesty with oneself and trust in The One Above. This is the kind of people the Torah wants us to be.

Good Shabbos!

https://torah.org/torah-portion/dvartorah-5759-behar/

Behar -- Blessings of Anticipation

by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine *

In this week’s parsha, the Torah describes the mitzvah of shemitah. We are told that the farmer is not permitted to plant, to prune, or to harvest the produce of his field. This is a tremendous demand to make of the farmer, and of a society that depended on local agriculture.

The Torah acknowledges the enormity of the test and states: “If you will ask, ‘What will we eat during this seventh year…?’ I shall direct My blessing in the sixth year,” so that you will be provided for during shemitah.

Likewise the Medrash declares that those “of great strength,” the people of fortitude described in Tehillim 103, are those who observe shemitah. Such is the magnitude of the test that they have passed by allowing the land to lie fallow during shemitah.

One simple question: If Hashem promises that there will be a bumper crop in the sixth year, then what is so hard about observing shemitah? Consider: If in the sixth year your harvest was double or triple its norm, I would think that we all would observe shemitah happily. Why are those who observe shemita considered to be people of great strength, faith, and fortitude?

There are different times in the shemitah cycle that the question, “What will we eat during the seventh year?” might have been asked. The question might have been asked before the bumper crop of the sixth year, in which case the abundance of blessing in the sixth year would indeed remove the challenge to observance. But it is possible that the question might have been asked after the bumper crop, but before observing the shemitah year.

I would like to suggest that the question, “What will we eat during the seventh year?” was indeed asked after experiencing the blessing of the sixth year, but before the shemitah year began. The challenge in observing shemitah is one that is basic to the human condition. The human being thinks, “The blessing provided until now is mine. I pocketed it. I already have opinions of how I would like to spend it.” If a person thinks that way, he will be challenged by the mitzvah. He may sincerely ask: Where will I get the wherewithal to do the mitzvah?

The Torah’s statement, “I shall direct My blessing in the sixth year,” is not just a promise. The statement, “I will provide in the sixth year,” is educational. The Torah recognizes that a Jew may say, “The blessing of the sixth year was nice. But how will I observe this mitzvah?” So, the Torah proceeds to introduce a new way of thinking. The blessing preceding a challenge isn’t yours to do with it as you choose. The blessing of the sixth year was given to you in anticipation of the challenge, so that you will have the tools to meet the challenge of shemitah properly.

I recall a story of a young man who lost his job and approached his father for financial assistance. His father asked, “You’ve been working for awhile son. Don’t you have any money saved away?” The son responded that he did, “But I’m saving it for a rainy day.” “Well son,” the father said with a gentle smile, “I think it’s raining.”

There are times that Hashem provides the “refuah before the makkah,” the solution before the challenge. He recognizes the challenges ahead of us as formidable, so he grants us the talents, the contacts, or the resources so that we will be equipped and ready. A person who pays attention will recognize a blessing as foreshadowing a mitzvah opportunity.

Our generation is historically the wealthiest of all the exiles. Hashem has declared upon us, “I have directed my blessing.” May we merit to be people of strength, and use our resources for mitzvah opportunities.

Wishing you and yours a wonderful Shabbos!

Rabbi Mordechai Rhine is a certified mediator and coach with Rabbinic experience of over 20 years. Based in Maryland, he provides services internationally via Zoom. He is the Director of TEACH613: Building Torah Communities, One family at a Time, and the founder of CARE Mediation, focused on Marriage/ Shalom Bayis and personal coaching. To reach Rabbi Rhine, his websites are www.care-mediation.com and www.teach613.org; his email is RMRhine@gmail.com. **For information or to join any Torah613 classes, contact Rabbi Rhine.**

Being True to Oneself and To Others: Thoughts on Parashat Behar

by Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

Some years ago, I attended a conference that attracted a number of rabbis and academics. At lunch, I found myself sitting next to a gentleman whose name tag indicated that he was a "Professor." Given his title, I assumed he taught in a university, and I asked him what was his field.

He replied that he taught remedial English in a local Junior High School. While this is certainly a worthy position, I had never heard of a Junior High School teacher claiming the title "Professor." This struck me as an example of occupational inflation – an attempt to puff up one's credentials and self-importance. It was what Matthew Arnold would have called "the grand gesture, without the grand thing."

When people assume inflated titles and when they trump up their credentials, this indicates their own feelings of inadequacy. They assume that no one will respect them if they were truthful about themselves – so they fabricate fancy titles and honors in the hope of impressing the public with their worth.

In fact, such behavior does just the opposite. While some people may fall for the false titles and credentials, most people can see right through the ruse. Instead of gaining respect for the pretenders, they lose respect. What thinking person

would want to honor someone who needs to stoop to title inflation, who tries to create a false and fraudulent self-image in the hope of impressing others?

No one is so worthy as the one who does not need to pretend about his/her worthiness. No one is more believable than someone who is honest, truthful, and realistic about him/herself.
In this week's Torah portion, we read: "and you shall not wrong one another" (Vayikra 25:17). A Hassidic Rebbe, Reb Bunim, offered an insightful interpretation of this verse by changing the first letter of the Hebrew word "amito" from an "ayin" to an "aleph." According to his reading, the verse means: "and you shall not do injustice to your own truthfulness." A person needs to have an honest self-evaluation, and should not compromise his/her integrity by compromising his/her truthfulness and trustworthiness.

In a society driven by competition, and desire for prestige and power, it happens often enough that people lose sight of this basic teaching. They want to advance; they want to be respected. In the process, they forget who they are. They inflate themselves into something untruthful; they insist that others accept their false self-evaluation; they do injustice to their own truthfulness and trustworthiness. They fool some of the people some of the time. In the long run, though, they do not fool anyone – least of all their own selves. How immensely sad!

We each are who we are; we each strive to be better, to grow, to become wiser. We need to take the time to understand who we are – our strengths and our weaknesses. We need to stay true to ourselves, and to others. If we lack honesty and truthfulness, we lack vital ingredients of a good, happy life.

To grow as truthful human beings, we must avoid trying to pass ourselves off for something we are not. Occupation "inflation" does not make us greater, but lesser. Puffed up egos do not make us more important, but less worthy.

"It has been told to you, O human being, what is good, and what the Lord does require of you: only to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8).

* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals.

The Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals has experienced a significant drop in donations during the pandemic. The Institute needs our help to maintain and strengthen our Institute. Each gift, large or small, is a vote for an intellectually vibrant, compassionate, inclusive Orthodox Judaism. You may contribute on our website jewishideas.org or you may send your check to Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, 2 West 70th Street, New York, NY 10023. Ed.: Please join me in helping the Instutite for Jewish Ideas and Ideals at this time.

https://www.jewishideas.org/being-true-oneself-and-othersthoughts-parashat-behar

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Eulogy at Wounded Knee **

by Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

We stand at the mass grave of men, women and children — Indians who were massacred at Wounded Knee in the bitter winter of 1890. Pondering the tragedy that occurred at Wounded Knee fills the heart with crying and with silence.

The great Sioux holy man, Black Elk, was still a child when he saw the dead bodies of his people strewn throughout this area. As an old man, he reflected on what he had seen: “I did not know then how much was ended. When I look back now from this high hill of my old age, I can still see the butchered women and children lying heaped and scattered all along the crooked gulch as plain as when I saw them with eyes still young. And I can see that something else died there in the bloody mud and was buried in the blizzard. A people’s dream died there. It was a beautiful dream. For the nation’s hoop is broken and scattered. There is no center any longer, and the sacred tree is dead.”

Indeed, the massacre at Wounded Knee was the culmination of decades of destruction and transformation for the American Indian. The decades of suffering somehow are encapsulated and symbolized by the tragedy at Wounded Knee. Well-armed American soldiers slaughtered freezing, almost defenseless, Indians—including women and children. Many of the soldiers were awarded medals of honor for their heroism, as if there could be any heroism in wiping out helpless people.

How did this tragedy happen? How was it possible for the soldiers — who no doubt thought of themselves as good men — to participate in a deed of such savagery? How was it possible that the United States government awarded medals of honor to so many of the soldiers?

The answer is found in one word: dehumanization. For the Americans, the Indians were not people at all, only wild savages. It was no different killing Indians than killing buffaloes or wild dogs. If an American general taught that "the only good Indian is a dead Indian," it means that he did not view Indians as human beings.

When you look a person in the eye and see him as a person, you simply can't kill him or hurt him. Human sympathy and compassion will be aroused. Doesn't he have feelings like you? Doesn't he love, fear, cry, laugh? Doesn't he want to protect his loved ones?

The tragedy of Wounded Knee is a tragedy of the American Indians. But it is also more than that. It is a profound tragedy of humanity. It is the tragedy of dehumanization. It is the tragedy that recurs again and again, and that is still with us today. Isn't our society still riddled with hatred, where groups are hated because of their religion, race, national origin?

Don't we still experience the pervasive depersonalization process where people are made into objects, robbed of their essential human dignity?

When Black Elk spoke, he lamented the broken hoop of his nation. The hoop was the symbol of wholeness, togetherness, harmony. Black Elk cried that the hoop of his nation had been broken at Wounded Knee.

But we might also add that the hoop of American life was also broken by the hatred and prejudice exemplified by Wounded Knee. And the hoop of our nation continues to be torn apart by the hatred that festers in our society.

Our task, the task of every American, is to do our share to mend the hoop, to repair the breaches.

The poet Stephen Vincent Benet, in his profound empathy, wrote: "Bury my heart at Wounded Knee." This phrase reflects the pathos of this place and the tragedy of this place.

But if we are to be faithful to Black Elk's vision, we must add: Revitalize our hearts at Wounded Knee. Awaken our hearts to the depths of this human tragedy. Let us devote our revitalized hearts toward mending the hoop of America, the hoop of all humanity That hoop is made of love; that hoop depends on respect for each other, for human dignity.

We cry at this mass grave at Wounded Knee. We cry for the victims. We cry for the recurrent pattern of hatred and dehumanization that continues to separate people, that continues to foster hatred and violence and murder.

Let us put the hoop of our nation back in order. For the sake of those who have suffered and for the sake of those who are suffering, let us put the hoop of our nation back in order.

* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals.

** In May 1992, Rabbi Marc Angel was among a group that spent five days in the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota. The visit brought the group together with descendants of the Sioux sage, Black Elk. The culmination of this intensive week was a memorial gathering at the cemetery in Wounded Knee, the resting place of victims of a horrific massacre of Sioux Indians in 1890, when Black Elk was still a child. Rabbi Angel delivered this eulogy at Wounded Knee.

]Ed. Note: The mass murders of ethnic groups, Jews and non-Jews, reflect a sickness of society, a dehumanization that is the opposite of what our religion teaches us. During Sefirah, and on Lag B'Omer in particular, we remember the murder of many of our people and the murder of others, victims of hatred usually based only on racial stereotypes. In this spirit, Rabbi Angel shares his contribution to remembering the racial murders at Wounded Knee.[

Review of Ronald Benun's New Volume on Psalms

Book Review ** by Rabbi Hayyim Angel *

After many decades of research, Ronald Benun has published the first volume of his life's work on the Book of Psalms. Benun follows in the footsteps of his revered mentor, Rabbi Solomon David Sassoon.

This work is original and creative, as Benun identifies a plethora of proposed allusions between selected psalms and the entire Bible, most notably the Book of Jeremiah.

Benun's thought-provoking analysis combines careful attention to minor details within a psalm, as well as the interlocking nexus of the entire Tanakh)"intertextuality"(. In the 1980s, Benun developed then cutting-edge software to improve his ability to compare multiple biblical passages at once. He presents the results of his research in his book.

Benun also submits explanations of the sequencing of the psalms: "Psalms is not simply an anthology of unrelated poems. Rather, it also has the characteristics of a book, with an overall message, and sequence from chapter to chapter and from unit to unit")306(. Ibn Ezra)on Psalm 3:1(rejected this approach out of hand, but other great commentators, such as Rabbi Saadiah Gaon, pursued this line of inquiry.

The volume is best suited to scholars and other highly educated laypeople with strong backgrounds in Jewish Studies.

The sheer quantity of potential parallels Benun adduces is breathtaking. Each reader likely will reach different conclusions as to which to accept as compelling and which to consider more tenuous. Even once a set of parallels is established, individuals also may disagree over how to interpret the significance of those parallels. As the adage goes, one person's peshat is another person's derash.

Following the path of the best of Jewish scholarly tradition, Benun encourages his readers to evaluate his arguments based on the evidence. He painstakingly presents his arguments with careful documentation, rigor, and clarity.

Another compelling methodological contribution is Rabbi Solomon Sassoon's "bumps in the road" interpretive stance. Many academic scholars have a tendency to smooth out difficulties, often by mechanically proposing text emendations. Benun retorts that more thoughtful attention to these anomalies may serve to unlock the intent of the biblical authors. For example, by deviating from an alphabetical acrostic or another pattern, an author may deliberately convey a shift in idea and mood. Emending a text to "correct" the anomaly, by contrast, is not only facile and tenuous, but may well obscure precisely the point the biblical author wishes to express through the use of that variance!

On a personal note, I also am coming out with a book on Psalms this year)Hayyim Angel, *Psalms: A Companion Volume*)New York: Kodesh Press, forthcoming(. I found it particularly enlightening to read an entirely different approach to the psalms. There are endless facets to the prophetic works of the Bible, and we are blessed to have high-quality scholarship like that of Ronald Benun now in the mixture of ideas and approaches to the ever-inspiring and elevating words of the Psalms.

** Ronald Benun, *Psalms and the Prophetic Message of Jeremiah,* vol. 1)Tebah: 2021(, 368 pages. Review by Rabbi Hayyim Angel.

* Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals.

https://www.jewishideas.org/article/review-ronald-benuns-new-volume-psalms

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Behar – Finding Myself in Community

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer *

One of the greatest challenges of a Torah lifestyle is balancing our own needs and identity with the needs and identity of the community. There can often be tension between our needs or our family's needs and the needs of the greater community. At times, there can also be a conflict between our own identity and personality and that of the community.

We may have our own standards and preferences for our own family, and they may be different in subtle or even large ways from the standards and preferences of the broader community.
Often times these tensions are unavoidable and even appropriate. Hashem created a world with many different people with different tastes, personalities, character and style. No two people are ever exactly alike. This can easily lead to differences of opinion on communal matters, as well. What is best for one individual, family or community, may often not be best for another. We, therefore, inevitably find ourselves struggling to balance who we are and who we want to be with the norms and mores of our communities.

When facing this struggle, one can easily begin to feel a resentment towards communities and a desire for self-identification outside of communal norms. One can even begin to resent the need for community, seeking solitude and avoiding engaging with others as much as possible. Yet, there is no question that community is a fundamental element of a Torah lifestyle. The maintenance of shuls, study halls and schools is considered the responsibility of every individual in the city. We are all expected to participate in funding communal institutions and participating in the vibrancy of the community. We seem forced to find a balance between our need for self-identity and self-expression and our responsibility to be a part of the community.

I believe, though, that if we explore the Torah's concept of the purpose and role of the community, the conflict is not as great as we may think. In this week's Parsha we are instructed to hear the Shofar in the Jubilee year, in addition to the requirement we have every year to hear the Shofar on Rosh Hashana. The Sefer Hachinuch in mitzvah 331 presents one reason for this mitzvah which is relevant to our discussion.

One of the mitzvos of the Jubilee year is that Jewish slaves must be set free. Some of these slaves may have been working for their masters for decades. It can be very hard for a master to free a slave who has been a trusted pillar of the household for so long. The slave as well may have forgotten what it is to be free, or simply be comfortable with his role within the household, and not want to leave and start on his own. The Sefer Hachinuch explains that it is for these individuals that we blow the Shofar in the Jubilee year. The sound of the Shofar is a call to action and strengthens one's heart. When he hears that call to action and knows that it is being sounded throughout the country, he knows that everyone else is also facing the loss of their Jewish slaves. The slave hears that call and knows that the other slaves are also facing the struggle of starting out on their own in life. When they realize that the community as a whole is facing similar struggles, this gives them the strength and courage to rise to the challenge and do what needs to be done.

The Sefer Hachinuch explains that Hashem wants each individual to hear the shofar, to ensure that no one is left out and not one single person fails in this mitzvah. This mitzvah is given specifically to provide us with a sense of community so that the individual can reach his own potential. Community provides a unique sense of strength and courage to the individual. It is only through that strength that one can truly rise above the struggles of life to truly express themselves and be all that they can be.

Building and participating in our community is not simply a responsibility we have to G-d. Community is a gift and a tool that G-d gives each and every one of us to achieve our own personal dreams. It is only through community, that we can find the strength and courage to reach for the stars and truly reach our own potential.

* Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD.

Give Earth a Break

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia *

The term "Tree Hugger" is not usually associated with observant Jews, which is truly hurtful and unfair, because we hug a tree at least four times a week. We do it, religiously, on Mondays and Thursdays, Shabbat mornings and afternoons. We gather around our tree, touch it, kiss it and then sit quietly and serenely listen to what it has to say. Yes, I am referring to the famous tree of Proverbs (3:18):

She (the Torah) is a tree of life to those who adhere to her

Since the Torah is a tree of life, its teaching and guidance apply to all aspects of the human condition, including the relationship between humans and the world they populate, but many believe that the values of Torah and the concern for

ecology and the well-being of the planet are diametrically opposed. It is a view that took root inside us, in Orthodox Judaism, as well as outside, in the academic world where its major proponent was the famous historian Lynn White. White criticized Western civilization for drifting away from nature and blamed it on the Jewish heritage of the Christian world:

> *"In sharp contrast (to Roman mythology), Christianity inherited from Judaism not only a concept of time as non-repetitive and linear but also a striking story of creation. By gradual stages a loving and all- powerful God had created light and darkness, the heavenly bodies, the earth and all its plants, animals, birds, and fishes. Finally, God had created Adam and, as an afterthought, Eve to keep man from being lonely. Man named all the animals, thus establishing his dominance over them. God planned all of this explicitly for man's benefit and rule: no item in the physical creation had any purpose save to serve man's purposes. And, although man's body is made of clay, he is not simply part of nature: he is made in God's image. Especially in its Western form, Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen."* (Lynn White Jr., The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis, 1967)

As mentioned before, there are many observant Jews who share this view. They feel that the world was created to serve man, whereas the power to determine the course of natural forces and resources is in the hands of the Creator. They brush aside ecology, climate change, pollution, recycling, and alternative energy sources. They believe that a Jew's role is to learn Torah and observe its commandments, and since the Shulhan Arukh contains no section dedicated to ecology, it is not part of our religious obligation.

In this rare moment of conceptual "agreement" between academia and the religious world, the criticism of the former against the latter should be directed at groups and individuals in certain places and times, rather than against Judaism as a whole. As every serious student of Tanakh could easily demonstrate, not only it is replete with breathtaking and majestic descriptions of nature (Psalms, Song of Songs, Proverbs, Job), not only the poetic freedom of the prophets analogizes every aspect of humanity to flora and fauna, but the Torah cares very much about the well-being of this physical world.

The problem is not with Torah and Judaism but rather with the Jewish lifestyle in exile. From an agrarian nation which was deeply connected to the ground and understood the need of Divine protection and blessing to help the earth provide its abundance, we became a nation of nomads, landless vagabonds who had to reinvent themselves and their professions wherever they went. After several centuries spent in Europe as vintners, Jews were forced by the feudal system to become money lenders. The emancipation, enlightenment and subsequent Zionist movement rekindled the desire to connect to the land, specifically in Israel, but the majority of contemporary Jews have never visited a farm, let alone lived as farmers.

Today we have a consumer mentality of having anything, anywhere, anytime. One click, and it will be delivered to your doorstep, to your car, or even fridge. We now got used to next day, same day, and within the hour delivery, by drones, autonomous robots, and soon, teleportation. Gas-guzzlers roam the roads, and oil dependency forces political powers to redefine values and ideals, including democracy and human rights. In Las Vegas and Palm Springs neatly manicured lawns and lusciously green golf courses have been gulping for years monstrous amounts of water against environmentalists' protests, and now California is facing such a severe drought which might force it to slash its agrarian productivity by twenty five percent.

We blatantly ignore the first role designated by God for humanity, described in the Torah even before the first commandment to mankind: cultivate and protect. For thousands of years mankind has been toiling and cultivating the land, turning raw material into precious products and constantly improving plants and animals by breeding, and in the last two centuries we have harnessed chemistry, biology and other scientific disciplines to our industrious chariots in order to quench the insatiable thirst of humanity for comfort and commodities. It is only during the previous jubilee (in the biblical sense = fifty years), however, that mankind started to realize that we are capable of transgressing the second part of the commandment by failing to protect earth, and that we are engaged in this transgression with religious zeal. But even that understanding was not enough. Only now, with severe droughts, extreme temperatures, record numbers of unseasonal storms, as well as growing concerns of epidemics and food shortages brought about by our reckless behavior, does the public begin to grasp the enormity of the problem and the responsibility it places on humanity's shoulders.

It is worthwhile to revisit the Torah and read the message in this week's Parasha, which offers an inspiration for re-establishing this much-needed balance.

The Torah commands the Israelites to fallow the land every seventh year, the Shemita, or Sabbatical year. During that year, naturally grown crops are divided evenly among the whole population, there are no class differences, and even the animals are not prevented from taking their share. This idea must have been shocking and disturbing to agrarian societies in ancient times, and it is still revolutionary today, but benefits of the seven-year cycle are immeasurable. First, the land recovers the trace minerals it needs without using ammonium-nitrate-based fertilizers, which endanger the aquatic ecosystems. Second, the social structure is corrected every seven years; the differences between the classes are eroded and a sense of unity and togetherness takes over. Lastly, the seventh year provides an opportunity to stop the insane race for provisions, power and glory. It allows people to reconnect to the precious gifts of their family and their inner self. After seven cycles of Shemita, or 49 years, the Jubilee is to be celebrated. During the Jubilee year, not only would the land be fallowed but all slaves would be released and all nonresidential properties that were previously sold would return to the original owner, thus preventing a possibility of a feudal society divided between lifetime slaves and powerful landlords.

The Shemita and Jubilee years provide an opportunity for people of all walks of life to slow down, contemplate and reflect on their lives, learn new skills and note changes in themselves and their environment, thus recalibrating the system and not losing balance.

For those of us who built their nests in the urban jungle, it is hard to think in terms of the daily reality of agrarian life, but the message of Shemita and Jubilee goes beyond the agrarian framework. Land and plant imagery is deeply embedded in our language. Love blossoms, ideas take root; institutions have branches and books leaves, and we speak of seed money, the fruit of our labor and field of expertise. All those point at an inner connection between the human soul and the natural world. Early kabbalists elaborated on the idea that Shabbat, the Shemita and the Jubilee are part of a mystical seven-stroke cycle that extends to greater cosmic cycles beyond our comprehension. Tuning into these cycles, mentally and physically, blesses us with inner calm, love and caring toward Planet Earth and toward all humans. It teaches us important life-transforming lessons, pulls us away from greed, desire, and arrogance, and reminds us of our duty to protect and preserve God's beautiful world.

Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi Haim Ovadia.

* Torah VeAhava (now SephardicU.com). Rabbi, Beth Sholom Sephardic Minyan (Potomac, MD) and faculty member, AJRCA non-denominational rabbinical school). **New: Many of Rabbi Ovadia's Devrei Torah are now available on Sefaria: https://www.sefaria.org/profile/haim-ovadia?tab=sheets** Hebrew quotes from the Torah, omitted here, are in Rabbi Ovadia's orginial in Sefaria.

Behar: Constructing Holy Space

By Rabbi Jason Goldstein *

After a long chapter that puts forth the details of Shemita and Yovel, the Torah concludes Parsha Behar with "You shall keep my Sabbaths and revere my Sanctuary" (Lev 26:2).

While these are essential mitzvot, why does the Torah conclude its elucidation of the laws of Shemita with two unrelated commands? Many commentators connect these mandates to the preceding passage. The concluding verses of the previous chapter outline that a Jew who is forced to indenture himself to a resident alien, a gentile living in the land of Israel, is to be set free upon reaching the Jubilee year (Lev 25:48). According to their analysis, the Torah then adds that, despite being subject to a gentile master, the subjugated Jew must nonetheless still carefully observe Shabbat and offer proper reverence to the Beit HaMikdash.

This verse may also be understood as not only referencing what immediately precedes it, but also our entire parsha as well. There are two underlying principles to Shemitah: the holiness of time and the holiness of space. Every seventh year is sanctified time, a year when the holiness of space, of Eretz Yisrael, is brought to the forefront. Our verse summarizes this notion by emphasizing the observance of Shabbat, holy time, and the veneration of the Temple, holy space.

Those living in Israel experience holiness in space on a regular basis. How can those living in the diaspora relate to this concept?

The Seforno comments that the Torah's command to "revere my Sanctuary" does not only refer to the Beit HaMikdash, but also to synagogues and batei midrash in the diaspora. These are holy spaces that demand our respect. Holiness, however, is not inherent to our synagogues and other communal spaces. Even if the Jewish people did not observe Shabbat, Shabbat itself is inherently holy, but our spaces are only holy if we make them holy.

A place as mundane as a living room or a lecture hall is transformed into holy space having introduced a Sefer Torah and devout prayer. A social hall is remade into a midkash me'at, a small sanctuary, when it becomes the focal point organizing a food drive. We must strive to make our synagogues and communal spaces holy, by ensuring that they are welcoming centers of heartfelt tefillah, chesed, and Torah.

Shabbat Shalom.

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https://library.yctorah.org/2022/05/behar22/

Can The World Be "Shomer Phone"?

By Rabbi Moshe Rube *

Jews don't missionize, right?

But I think in one case we can make an exception. And that is convincing the world to not use their smart phones one day a week.

It doesn't have to be on Shabbat (Though to make it convenient as possible for Jews, we should try to make it so.)

And it doesn't have to be all or nothing. If the UN announces Saturdays as "Freedom From Smart Phones Day," some people may turn off their phones the whole day while some may only manage an hour. Some might go halfway and take calls on their phone but resolve not to check their email while others will pledge not to scroll through social media.

When we'd meet others on the street, one of the questions we could ask is "Are you Shomer Phone?" or "How Shomer Phone Are You?"

Whatever level of observance a person chooses there would exist a general recognition that the constant tug to glue ourselves to our phones must be kept under control if we are to use these tools in the most expedient, useful, and beneficial way for our own lives and for humanity.

To be clear, I think smart phones are the most revolutionary and useful tool mankind has ever created. We should admire and be grateful for the power we have to access knowledge and affect the whole world from our fingertips. We're just beginning to tap their potential, and I hope more apps are created that contribute to everyone's well being and growth.

What I'm against is the sense of addiction to our smartphones. Specifically the sense that we feel we have no choice but to turn to it in times of anxiety or boredom. To feel that if we don't check our email for the umpteenth time that hour, we'll have missed something important.

A good rule of thumb is that if we feel incapable of shutting off our phone during the day for any amount of time without inviting that horrible feeling of a sinking pit in our stomachs, we may be under the phone's control rather than it being under our control.

Dr. Moshe Feldenkrais (1904-1984), Israeli physicist, judo black belt and polymath, used this feeling as being out of control as a general definition of anxiety. If we perform an action and don't feel we have any choice in the matter, but that

we must do it because the routine demands it and we are incapable of saying no, that action may be a compulsion rather than a free act. We will then feel that sinking "anxious" sensation that we are backed into a corner and have lost our free will.

This applies to our phones as well as to any routine where we feel stuck in. Even to how we take our morning coffee.

If you like your coffee with cream, sugar, two squirts of mocha syrup, cinnamon and a dollop of whipped cream, then fantastic. But if you feel a terrible tightening in your chest if you don't get it this way every morning, you may be under the coffee's control rather than the coffee under your control.

So much of Jewish observance seems to be tied to freeing life's obligations from becoming anxiety inducing compulsions. For instance, there's no question that Judaism values work, especially agricultural work in the land of Israel.

But we are not automatons. We should control how we work and not let our work control us.

Rabbi Ovadia Sforno (1475-1550) says that this is the reason for both Shabbos and Shemittah, which we read about in our Torah portion. The Torah tells the farmer to leave his work for a year. The farmer must leave the land alone so he can focus on other things in his life like reaching God through introspection. Then when he returns to his work the next year, he can do it with a sense of free choice, a sense that he chooses now to go to work rather than being enslaved to the grind.

Personally, this has been an effect that Shabbat has had on me. Like all of us, I can get into various routines throughout the week and the feeling that I have to stick to this regimen no matter what can begin to creep in.

But Shabbos upends the routines.

Certain actions become restricted so I must use my creativity to find new ways of doing things. Then when I return to my weekly routine, I feel a greater sense that I am choosing it and can adjust it much more easily to fit my goals. Shabbos reminds me that I do not exist for my routine. The routine exists for me.

It's up to you how you apply this Shabbat/Shemittah concept in your life. It's not all or nothing. Even the smallest actions can have a significant effect.

Maybe you'll decide to turn off your phone during the day for a half hour just to show that you can.

Or maybe have your coffee a different way tomorrow morning. Show that coffee who's boss.

Shabbat and Shemittah Shalom!

Rabbi Moshe Rube

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Rav Kook Torah
Behar: Shemitah -- Window to the Future

Like the Garden of Eden

Ask any farmer — agricultural labor is hard work. Plowing, planting, weeding, pruning, harvesting, and so on. That, however, is not how it was supposed to be. The world was originally designed to be like life in the Garden of Eden. Agricultural labor was only cursed after Adam’s sin -- “By the sweat of your brow you will eat bread” (Gen. 3:19).

As humanity advances morally, however, the earth responds in like measure with sublime blessing. The Talmud in Ketubot 111b foretells that, in the future, cakes and fine clothing will sprout directly from the ground. At that time, even physical labor will take on a nobler, more refined character.

We are granted a glimpse of this future world through the mitzvah of Shemitah, the Sabbatical year. During this year of cessation from all agricultural labor, we are content to partake of the land's natural produce. Like the tranquil world of the Garden of Eden, we are able to enjoy the earth's God-given bounty, without toil and labor.

Other aspects of the Garden of Eden are temporarily restored during the sabbatical year. With the prohibition of buying and selling Shemitah produce, economic competition is reduced. Even more: the heart is refined to recognize the common brotherhood of all creatures. We may eat of the earth's produce only for as long as it is also available to the animals in the field. The Sabbatical and Jubilee years are a taste of a future utopia. They herald the coming of a sublime new world that is the result of a loftier spirituality.

Elevating Agriculture

Until then, it is our obligation to elevate agricultural labor from its lowly state. This is accomplished through the holy light found in technology and science. In the future, the Sages tell us, all artisans will leave their crafts and work the land (Yevamot 63a). This does not mean that they will no longer work in their respective professions, but that all crafts and sciences will be used to redeem the earth and its toil from its primordial curse.

This progress in agriculture, however, only redeems mankind. It is only a preparatory stage in the redemption of the entire world. In the final redemption, working the land will not be an obligation, but a privilege and a pleasure. We will pleasantly tour in the Garden of Eden ('Eden' meaning 'pleasure'), working and guarding it.

There are future levels even beyond the Garden of Eden. Going past the garden to Eden itself, however, is beyond all prophetic vision; Eden is a realm that transcends all forms of labor and guarding.

(Gold from the Land of Israel, pp. 216-217. Adapted from Orot HaKodesh, vol. II, pp. 563-564.)

http://www.ravkooktorah.org/BEHAR64.htm

Evolution or Revolution? (Behar 5779)

By Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l, Former Chief Rabbi of the U.K.*

There are, it is sometimes said, no controlled experiments in history. Every society, every age, and every set of circumstances is unique. If so, there is no science of history. There are no universal rules to guide the destiny of nations. Yet this is not quite true. The history of the past four centuries does offer us something close to a controlled experiment, and the conclusion to be drawn is surprising.

The modern world was shaped by four revolutions: the English (1642–1651), the American (1776), the French (1789), and the Russian (1917). Their outcomes were radically different. In England and America, revolution brought war, but led to a gradual growth of civil liberties, human rights, representative government, and eventually, democracy. On the other hand, the French revolution gave rise to the "Reign of Terror" between 5 September 1793, and 28 July 1794, in which more than forty thousand enemies of the revolution were summarily executed by the guillotine. The Russian revolution led to one of the most repressive totalitarianism regimes in history. As many as twenty million people are estimated to have died unnatural deaths under Stalin between 1924 and 1953. In revolutionary France and the Soviet Union, the dream of utopia ended in a nightmare of hell.

What was the salient difference between them? There are multiple explanations. History is complex and it is wrong to simplify, but one detail in particular stands out. The English and American revolutions were inspired by the Hebrew Bible as read and interpreted by the Puritans. This happened because of the convergence of a number of factors in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: the Reformation, the invention of printing, the rise of literacy and the spread of books, and the availability of the Hebrew Bible in vernacular translations. For the first time, people could read the Bible for themselves, and what they discovered when they read the prophets and stories of civil disobedience like that of Shifrah and Puah, the Hebrew midwives, was that it is permitted, even sometimes necessary, to resist tyrants in the name of God. The political philosophy of the English revolutionaries and the Puritans who set sail for America in the 1620s and 1630s was dominated by the work of the Christian Hebraists who based their thought on the history of ancient Israel.[1]

The French and Russian revolutions, by contrast, were hostile to religion and were inspired instead by philosophy: that of Jean-Jacques Rousseau in the case of France, and of Karl Marx in the case of Russia. There are obvious differences between Torah and philosophy. The most well-known is that one is based on revelation, the other on reason. Yet I suspect it was not this that made the difference to the course of revolutionary politics. Rather, it lay in their respective understandings of time.

Parshat Behar sets out a revolutionary template for a society of justice, freedom, and human dignity. At its core is the idea of the Jubilee, whose words *("Proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof"*) are engraved on one of the great symbols of freedom, the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia. One of its provisions is the release of slaves:

> *If your brother becomes impoverished and is sold to you, do not work him like a slave. He shall be with you like an employee or a resident. He shall serve you only until the Jubilee year and then he and his children shall be free to leave you and return to their family and to the hereditary land of their ancestors. For they are My servants whom I brought out of the land of Egypt; they shall not be sold as slaves… For the Children of Israel are servants to Me: they are My servants whom I brought out of the land of Egypt – I am the Lord, your God.* Lev. 25:39–42

The terms of the passage are clear. Slavery is wrong. It is an assault on the human condition. To be "in the image of God" means to be summoned to a life of freedom. The very idea of the sovereignty of God means that He alone has claim to the service of mankind. Those who are God's servants may not be slaves to anyone else. As Judah Halevi put it, "The servants of time are servants of servants. Only God's servant alone is free."[2]

At this distance of time it is hard to recapture the radicalism of this idea, overturning as it did the very foundations of religion in ancient times. The early civilisations – Mesopotamia, Egypt – were based on hierarchies of power which were seen to inhere in the very nature of the cosmos. Just as there were (so it was believed) ranks and gradations among the heavenly bodies, so there were on earth. The great religious rituals and monuments were designed to mirror and endorse these hierarchies. In this respect, Karl Marx was right. Religion in antiquity was the opium of the people. It was the robe of sanctity concealing the naked brutality of power. It canonised the status quo.

At the heart of Israel was an idea almost unthinkable to the ancient mind: that God intervenes in history to liberate slaves – that the supreme Power is on the side of the powerless. [*Ed. Emphasis added*] It is no accident that Israel was born as a nation under conditions of slavery. It has carried throughout history the memory of those years – the bread of affliction and the bitter herbs of servitude – because the people of Israel serves as an eternal reminder to itself and the world of the moral necessity of liberty and the vigilance needed to protect it. The free God desires the free worship of free human beings.

Yet the Torah does not abolish slavery. That is the paradox at the heart of Parshat Behar. To be sure, it was limited and humanised. Every seventh day, slaves were granted rest and a taste of freedom. In the seventh year, Israelite slaves were set free. If they chose otherwise they were released in the Jubilee year. During their years of service they were to be treated like employees. They were not to be subjected to back-breaking or spirit-crushing labour. Everything dehumanising about slavery was forbidden. Yet slavery itself was not banned. Why not? If it was wrong, it should have been annulled. Why did the Torah allow a fundamentally flawed institution to continue?

It is Moses Maimonides in *The Guide for the Perplexed* who explains the need for time in social transformation. All processes in nature, he argues, are gradual. The foetus develops slowly in the womb. Stage by stage, a child becomes mature. And what applies to individuals applies to nations and civilisations:

> *It is impossible to go suddenly from one extreme to the other. It is therefore, according to the nature of man, impossible for him suddenly to discontinue everything to which he has been accustomed.*[3]

So God did not ask of the Israelites that they suddenly abandon everything they had become used to in Egypt. "God refrained from prescribing what the people by their natural disposition would be incapable of obeying."

In miracles, God changes physical nature but never human nature. Were He to do so, the entire project of the Torah – the free worship of free human beings – would have been rendered null and void. There is no greatness in programming a

million computers to obey instructions. **God's greatness lay in taking the risk of creating a being, Homo sapiens, capable of choice and responsibility and thus of freely obeying God.** [Ed: *emphasis added*]

God wanted humankind to abolish slavery, but by their own choice, in their own time. Slavery as such was not abolished in Britain and America until the nineteenth century, and in America, not without a civil war. The challenge to which Torah legislation was an answer is: how can one create a social structure in which, of their own accord, people will eventually come to see slavery as wrong and freely choose to abandon it?

The answer lay in a single deft stroke: to change slavery from an ontological condition to a temporary circumstance: from what I am to a situation in which I find myself, now but not forever. No Israelite was allowed to be treated or to see him or herself as a slave. They might be reduced to slavery for a period of time, but this was a passing plight, not an identity. Compare the account given by Aristotle:

> *[There are people who are] slaves by nature, and it is better for them to be subject to this kind of control. For a man who is able to belong to another person is by nature a slave.*[4]

For Aristotle, slavery is an ontological condition, a fact of birth. Some are born to rule, others to be ruled. This is precisely the worldview to which the Torah is opposed. The entire complex of biblical legislation is designed to ensure that neither the slave nor their owner should ever see slavery as a permanent condition. A slave should be treated "like an employee or a resident," in other words, with the same respect as is due a free human being. In this way the Torah ensured that, although slavery could not be abolished overnight, it would eventually be. And so it happened.

There are profound differences between philosophy and Judaism, and one lies in their respective understandings of time. For Plato and his heirs, philosophy is about the truth that is timeless. For Hegel and Marx, it is about "historical inevitability," the change that comes, regardless of the conscious decisions of human beings. Judaism is about ideals like human freedom that are realised in and through time, by the free decisions of free persons.

That is why we are commanded to hand on the story of the Exodus to our children every Passover, so that they too taste the unleavened bread of affliction and the bitter herbs of slavery. It is why we are instructed to ensure that every seventh day, all those who work for us are able to rest and breathe the expansive air of freedom. It is why, even when there were Israelite slaves, they had to be released in the seventh year, or failing that, in the Jubilee year. **This is the way of evolution, not revolution, gradually educating every member of Israelite society that it is wrong to enslave others so that eventually the entire institution will be abolished, not by divine fiat but by human consent. The end result is a freedom that is secure, as opposed to the freedom of the philosophers that is all too often another form of tyranny.** [Ed.: *emphasis added*] Chillingly, Rousseau once wrote that if citizens did not agree with the "general will," they would have to be "forced to be free." That is not liberty but slavery.

The Torah is based, as its narratives make clear, on history, a realistic view of human character, and a respect for freedom and choice. Philosophy is often detached from history and a concrete sense of humanity. Philosophy sees truth as system. The Torah tells truth as story, and a story is a sequence of events extended through time. Revolutions based on philosophical systems fail because change in human affairs takes time, and philosophy has rarely given an adequate account of the human dimension of time.

Revolutions based on Tanach succeed, because they go with the grain of human nature, recognising that it takes time for people to change. The Torah did not abolish slavery, but it set in motion a process that would lead people to come of their own accord to the conclusion that it was wrong. That it did so, albeit slowly, is one of the wonders of history.

FOOTNOTES:

[1] See Eric Nelson, The Hebrew Republic: Jewish Sources and the Transformation of European Political Thought (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2010).

[2] Ninety-Two Poems and Hymns of Judah Halevi, trans. Thomas Kovach, Eva Jospe, and Gilya Gerda Schmidt (Albany, N Y: State University of New York Press, 2000), 124.

[3] Maimonides, The Guide for the Perplexed, III:32.

[4] Aristotle, Politics I:5.

https://www.rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/behar/evolution-or-revolution/

Alone in the World: 43 Years Since Entebbe

By Lazer Gurkow * © Chabad 2022

Entebbe

Next month will mark the 43rd anniversary of Israel's finest hour: the hostage rescue at Entebbe. When the crisis began in June of 1976, Israel firmly believed that the fate of the Jewish hostages was the legal responsibility of France, under whose flag the airplane had flown when it was hijacked. But, on the fifth day of the crisis, when all but the Jewish hostages were released, the Israeli government realized that Jews were once again alone in the world.

History was repeating itself. Only nine years earlier, when Egypt crossed the Suez Canal and threatened to invade, the world powers refused to help and Israel was left to defend itself alone. Thirty years earlier, when five Arab states attacked, no one came to its aid, and Israel was left alone in the world. Thirty-five years earlier when Jews were being gassed in Europe, the Jew was alone in the world.

But the time for dying had come to an end. Jews now had the means to fight back, and with trust in the Creator they set out to the rescue. It was Israel's finest hour.

Alone in The World

The Torah tell us that if an impoverished Jew is forced to sell his ancestral home, his closest relative should come to his rescue and repurchase it. And if a man has no rescuer — if he is alone in the world — he is entitled to buy back his own home when he finds the money.1

Our sages were shocked by this verse. How could it be that a Jew would have no rescuer? How can a Jew be alone in the world? So long as the Jewish people have one another, a Jew is never alone. The sages then explained that every Jew has many potential rescuers, but since they are not obligated to come to his rescue, it is possible that a Jew could be left alone in the world.

Rashi, the foremost biblical commentator, offered a different answer. Rashi explained that the Torah is referring to a situation in which a Jew does not have sufficient funds to rescue his fellow. The other commentators wondered why Rashi offered an explanation that is different from the one in the Talmud.

According to the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rashi addressed his commentary to the five-year-old student who is reading the Torah for the first time. Rashi, the seasoned teacher, knew that no Jewish child could fathom the possibility that a Jew with means would refuse to help a fellow Jew in need. Because a Jew is never alone in the world. Thus Rashi concludes that the Torah speaks of a scenario in which a Jew wants to help, but sadly cannot.

During the Holocaust, Jews wanted to rescue their brethren, but lacked the means. But in 1976, Jews had the means, and if they had the means, they had an obligation. They would never leave a fellow Jew to suffer.

Begin's Bible Group

Less than a year after Operation Entebbe, Israel elected a new government, and Menachem Begin was the new prime minister. Once again, Israel faced pressure from the nations. This time it was American president Jimmy Carter who wanted Israel to negotiate peace with the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), a body committed to the destruction of the Jewish state.

Just before departing for Washington, Prime Minister Begin invited 20 biblical scholars to his home for what was to become a weekly Saturday night Bible-study group.

Prime Minister Begin opened the discussion with the verse, “Israel shall dwell alone; it shall not be reckoned among the nations.”2 He applied the verse to the contemporary age, pointing out that Israel sits alone at the United Nations. Each nation belongs to a regional group bound by geography, religion, history, culture and language. But Israel sits alone in the world. No nation shares our unique narrative.

The scholars began to chime in, pointing out that Israel dwells alone of its own volition. It wants to remain apart from the nations because its mandate is not merely nationhood, but also faith. Israel has two birth moments, the Exodus and Sinai. At the Exodus we became a nation, and at Sinai we became a faith. As a faith-based nation, our relations with the community of nations will never normalize.

Then a dignified woman in her fifties asked for the floor. It was the revered scholar, Nechama Leibowitz, whose commentaries and classes were immensely popular. She pointed out that the word “yitchashav,” translated as “reckoned” — as in “shall not be reckoned among the nations” — is rendered in the reflexive form, which gives the meaning, “This is a people that does not reckon itself among the nations.”3

We are not reckoned among the nations. When we are in trouble, they don’t come to our aid. We rescue ourselves and have learned not to expect help from others. But do we lament this lack of reckoning, or do we welcome it? Do we reckon ourselves among the nations?

This is a hard-hitting question. The principle aim of Zionism was normalization. It was hoped that when Jews had a land, they would be a nation among nations. But acceptance isn’t the Jew’s mandate. We were charged at Sinai to be G d’s people on earth, not the people’s people. When we confront the lack of acceptance among the nations, we should not feel that we have lost our place in the world.

We are a nation that dwells alone and does not reckon itself among nations. They badger us, they remonstrate with us, and they fail to come to our aid. That is our lot. But our role is lofty. Our mandate is noble. Our goals are higher. We are G d’s people on earth.

Finding Respect

The lasting question is, why don’t the nations see us that way? Why don’t they respect us?

The answer can be summed up in the words of Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks: *“Non-Jews respect Jews that respect Judaism. Non-Jews don’t respect Jews that don’t respect Judaism.”*

If our goal is to be reckoned among the nations, the nations will not reckon with us. If our goal is to be a light among the nations, they will respect us. Not as their member, but as their light. They will not be our friends. They will not be our rescuers. And in that sense, we will be alone in the world. But, begrudgingly, they will learn from us. And in the end, they will respect us.

I close with the momentous words that the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, of righteous memory, told my wife’s grandmother when she complained that she felt alone in the world. He replied, *“Remember that a Jew is never alone. A Jew is always with G d.”*

FOOTNOTES:

1. Leviticus 25:26; Rashi, ibid.; Babylonian Talmud, Kiddushin 21a.

2. Numbers 23:9.

3. Yehudah Avner, The Prime Ministers, The Toby Press, 2010, pp. 395-399. In 1972, Yitzchak Rabin had a similar discussion on this very verse with the Lubavitcher Rebbe.

* Spiritual leader of Congregation Beth Tefilah in London, Ontario.

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/4386796/jewish/Alone-in-the-World-43-Years-Since-Entebbe.htm

Behar: The Value of Work

by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky * © Chabad 2022

G-d taught Moses the laws of giving charity **and the prohibition of charging interest on loans.**

G-d instructed Moses to tell the Jewish people, *"You must not take interest":* Leviticus 25:36

There is a subtle yet crucial difference between an investor profiting from his investment and a lender profiting from a loan. When we invest in a financial venture, the invested money still belongs to us; thus, our money is "working" for us. We have therefore earned the profit that the venture returns.

In contrast, a loan transfers ownership of the principal to the borrower; the money now belongs to the borrower, even though he is obligated to repay it later. Thus, taking interest on a loan is profiting from someone else's effort without having participated in that effort. The lender is collecting interest based only upon the fact that the money used to belong to him.

Taking interest on a loan is therefore opposed to the way G-d wants the world to operate. G-d intended that we refine ourselves by working for our achievements, both spiritual and material. In the words of the sages, "If someone says to you, 'I have toiled without results,' do not believe him.

If he says, 'I have not toiled, but have nonetheless seen results,' do not believe him either. Only if he says, 'I have toiled and seen results,' believe him."

* — from *Daily Wisdom*

Gut Shabbos,

Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman
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Likutei Divrei Torah

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Covenant and Conversation
Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

Evolution or Revolution?

There are, it is sometimes said, no controlled experiments in history. Every society, every age, and every set of circumstances is unique. If so, there is no science of history. There are no universal rules to guide the destiny of nations. Yet this is not quite true. The history of the past four centuries does offer us something close to a controlled experiment, and the conclusion to be drawn is surprising.

The modern world was shaped by four revolutions: the English (1642–1651), the American (1776), the French (1789), and the Russian (1917). Their outcomes were radically different. In England and America, revolution brought war, but led to a gradual growth of civil liberties, human rights, representative government, and eventually, democracy. On the other hand, the French revolution gave rise to the "Reign of Terror" between 5 September 1793, and 28 July 1794, in which more than forty thousand enemies of the revolution were summarily executed by the guillotine. The Russian revolution led to one of the most repressive totalitarianism regimes in history. As many as twenty million people are estimated to have died unnatural deaths under Stalin between 1924 and 1953. In revolutionary France and the Soviet Union, the dream of utopia ended in a nightmare of hell.

What was the salient difference between them? There are multiple explanations. History is complex and it is wrong to simplify, but one detail in particular stands out. The English and American revolutions were inspired by the Hebrew Bible as read and interpreted by the Puritans. This happened because of the convergence of a number of factors in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: the Reformation, the invention of printing, the rise of literacy and the spread of books, and the availability of the Hebrew Bible in vernacular translations. For the first time, people could read the Bible for themselves, and what they discovered when they read the prophets and stories of civil disobedience like that of Shifrah and Puah, the Hebrew midwives, was that it is permitted, even sometimes necessary, to resist tyrants in the name of God. The political philosophy of the English revolutionaries and the Puritans who set sail for America in the 1620s and 1630s was dominated by the work of the Christian Hebraists who based their thought on the history of ancient Israel.[1]

The French and Russian revolutions, by contrast, were hostile to religion and were inspired instead by philosophy: that of Jean-Jacques Rousseau in the case of France, and of Karl Marx in the case of Russia. There are obvious differences between Torah and philosophy. The most well-known is that one is based on revelation, the other on reason. Yet I suspect it was not this that made the difference to the course of revolutionary politics. Rather, it lay in their respective understandings of time.

Parshat Behar sets out a revolutionary template for a society of justice, freedom, and human dignity. At its core is the idea of the Jubilee, whose words ("Proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof") are engraved on one of the great symbols of freedom, the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia. One of its provisions is the release of slaves:

> If your brother becomes impoverished and is sold to you, do not work him like a slave. He shall be with you like an employee or a resident. He shall serve you only until the Jubilee year and then he and his children shall be free to leave you and return to their family and to the hereditary land of their ancestors. For they are My servants whom I brought out of the land of Egypt; they shall not be sold as slaves… For the Children of Israel are servants to Me: they are My servants whom I brought out of the land of Egypt – I am the Lord, your God. (Lev. 25:39–42)

The terms of the passage are clear. Slavery is wrong. It is an assault on the human condition. To be "in the image of God" means to be summoned to a life of freedom. The very idea of the sovereignty of God means that He alone has claim to the service of mankind. Those who are God's servants may not be slaves to anyone else. As Judah Halevi put it, "The servants of time are servants of servants. Only God's servant alone is free."[2]

At this distance of time it is hard to recapture the radicalism of this idea, overturning as it did the very foundations of religion in ancient times. The early civilisations – Mesopotamia, Egypt – were based on hierarchies of power which were seen to inhere in the very nature of the cosmos. Just as there were (so it was believed) ranks and gradations among the heavenly bodies, so there were on earth. The great religious rituals and monuments were designed to mirror and endorse these hierarchies. In this respect, Karl Marx was right. Religion in antiquity was the opium of the people. It was the robe of sanctity concealing the naked brutality of power. It canonised the status quo.

At the heart of Israel was an idea almost unthinkable to the ancient mind: that God intervenes in history to liberate slaves – that the supreme Power is on the side of the powerless. It is no accident that Israel was born as a nation under conditions of slavery. It has carried throughout history the memory of those years – the bread of affliction and the bitter herbs of servitude – because the people of Israel serves as an eternal reminder to itself and the world of the moral necessity of liberty and the vigilance needed to protect it. The free God desires the free worship of free human beings.

Yet the Torah does not abolish slavery. That is the paradox at the heart of Parshat Behar. To be sure, it was limited and humanised. Every seventh day, slaves were granted rest and a taste of freedom. In the seventh year, Israelite slaves were set free. If they chose otherwise they were released in the Jubilee year. During their years of service they were to be treated like employees. They were not to be subjected to back-breaking or spirit-crushing labour. Everything dehumanising about slavery was forbidden. Yet slavery itself was not banned. Why not? If it was wrong, it should have been annulled. Why did the Torah allow a fundamentally flawed institution to continue?

It is Moses Maimonides in The Guide for the Perplexed who explains the need for time in social transformation. All processes in nature, he argues, are gradual. The foetus develops slowly in the womb. Stage by stage, a child becomes mature. And what applies to individuals applies to nations and civilisations:

> It is impossible to go suddenly from one extreme to the other. It is therefore, according to the nature of man, impossible for him suddenly to discontinue everything to which he has been accustomed.[3]

So God did not ask of the Israelites that they suddenly abandon everything they had become used to in Egypt. "God refrained from prescribing what the people by their natural disposition would be incapable of obeying."

In miracles, God changes physical nature but never human nature. Were He to do so, the entire project of the Torah – the free worship of free human beings – would have been rendered null and void. There is no greatness in programming a million computers to obey instructions. God's greatness lay in taking the risk of creating a being, Homo sapiens, capable of choice and responsibility and thus of freely obeying God.

God wanted humankind to abolish slavery, but by their own choice, in their own time. Slavery as such was not abolished in Britain and America until the nineteenth century, and in America, not without a civil war. The challenge to which Torah legislation was an answer is: how can one create a social structure in which, of their own accord, people will eventually come to see slavery as wrong and freely choose to abandon it?

The answer lay in a single deft stroke: to change slavery from an ontological condition to a temporary circumstance: from what I am to a situation in which I find myself, now but not forever. No Israelite was allowed to be treated or to see him or herself as a slave. They might be reduced to slavery for a period of time, but this was a passing plight, not an identity. Compare the account given by Aristotle:

[There are people who are] slaves by nature, and it is better for them to be subject to this kind of control. For a man who is able to belong to another person is by nature a slave. [4]

For Aristotle, slavery is an ontological condition, a fact of birth. Some are born to rule, others to be ruled. This is precisely the worldview to which the Torah is opposed. The entire complex of biblical legislation is designed to ensure that neither the slave nor their owner should ever see slavery as a permanent condition. A slave should be treated "like an employee or a resident," in other words, with the same respect as is due a free human being. In this way the Torah ensured that, although slavery could not be abolished overnight, it would eventually be. And so it happened.

There are profound differences between philosophy and Judaism, and one lies in their respective understandings of time. For Plato and his heirs, philosophy is about the truth that is timeless. For Hegel and Marx, it is about "historical inevitability," the change that comes, regardless of the conscious decisions of human beings. Judaism is about ideals like human freedom that are realised in and through time, by the free decisions of free persons.

That is why we are commanded to hand on the story of the Exodus to our children every Passover, so that they too taste the unleavened bread of affliction and the bitter herbs of slavery. It is why we are instructed to ensure that every seventh day, all those who work for us are able to rest and breathe the expansive air of freedom. It is why, even when there were Israelite slaves, they had to be released in the seventh year, or failing that, in the Jubilee year. This is the way of evolution, not revolution, gradually educating every member of Israelite society that it is wrong to enslave others so that eventually the entire institution will be abolished, not by divine fiat but by human consent. The end result is a freedom that is secure, as opposed to the freedom of the philosophers that is all too often another form of tyranny. Chillingly, Rousseau once wrote that if citizens did not agree with the "general will," they would have to be "forced to be free." That is not liberty but slavery.

The Torah is based, as its narratives make clear, on history, a realistic view of human character, and a respect for freedom and choice. Philosophy is often detached from history and a concrete sense of humanity. Philosophy sees truth as system. The Torah tells truth as story, and a story is a sequence of events extended through time. Revolutions based on philosophical systems fail because change in human affairs takes time, and philosophy has rarely given an adequate account of the human dimension of time.

Revolutions based on Tanach succeed, because they go with the grain of human nature, recognising that it takes time for people to change. The Torah did not abolish slavery, but it set in motion a process that would lead people to come of their own accord to the conclusion that it was wrong. That it did so, albeit slowly, is one of the wonders of history.

[1] See Eric Nelson, The Hebrew Republic: Jewish Sources and the Transformation of European Political Thought (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2010).
[2] Ninety-Two Poems and Hymns of Judah Halevi, trans. Thomas Kovach, Eva Jospe, and Gilya Gerda Schmidt (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2000), 124.
[3] Maimonides, The Guide for the Perplexed, III:32.
[4] Aristotle, Politics I:5.

The Person in the Parsha
Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

The Time of Your Life

It is a lesson I first learned in a course I took on the skills of interviewing long ago. The instructor taught us that the way to really size up a candidate for a job is to determine how he uses his time. He taught us that one question designed to assist the interviewer to make that determination is, "Where do you see yourself in five years?"

I have since had decades of interviewing experience in many diverse settings and have developed a set of other questions, all intended for the same objective. They include:

"What do you in your spare time?"

"How would you spend your time if you won the lottery and no longer had to work for a living?"

And, in academic or rabbinic interviewing,

"How would you use your time if you were given a sabbatical leave from your position?"

It is this last question which brings us to this week's Torah portion, Behar. In the very beginning, we read of the mitzvah of letting the land lie fallow (unsown) every seven years, which is the sabbatical year; also known as shemitah. "But in the seventh year the land shall have a Sabbath of complete rest, a Sabbath of the Lord: you shall not sow your field or prune your vineyard." (Leviticus 25:4)

The Torah spells out quite clearly what can and cannot be done in the way of tilling the soil. Indeed, there is an entire Tractate of Mishnah and Jerusalem Talmud which gives specific and detailed guidelines relating to the land and the produce of the shemitah year. I have always been intrigued and even a bit mystified, however, by the fact that, to my knowledge, nothing is said about what the farmer is supposed to do with his spare time that year.

Imagine a farmer who has been working industriously, 24/6, for six years. Then, as Rosh Hashanah of year seven approaches, very little work is permitted to him, and he becomes a gentleman of leisure. How does he use his time?

It is inspiring to note that there are pious farmers in Israel nowadays who scrupulously observe shemitah. And it is interesting that they indeed create structured programs for their "leisure" time that year. They study Torah, particularly the sections related to agriculture. They travel to farms across the country teaching less knowledgeable farmers halachot pertaining to farming. They even spend time updating their own technical agricultural skills.

There is a lesson to be learned here. The Torah legislates that the land needs a sabbatical year to lie fallow in order to renew itself. We must come to the realization ourselves that we too need a sabbatical year, but for us staying fallow is not our mission. Rather, it is to use such a time for physical, intellectual and spiritual reinvigoration.

The Torah continues to prescribe yet another "leisure" year, a sabbatical year after seven sabbaticals years, called the Jubilee year. "And you shall hallow the fiftieth year. You shall proclaim release throughout the land for all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you: each of you shall return to his holding and each of you shall return to his family." (Levitivus 25:10) The personal, spiritual meaning of the fiftieth year of life was brought home to me recently. I have been re-visiting the writings of Hillel Zeitlin, a victim of the Holocaust.

Zeitlin was a journalist, philosopher, and mystic who wrote a number of poems in the form of prayers, or perhaps prayers in the form of poems. One is entitled "On the Threshold of My Erev Shabbat".

He writes in anticipation of his fiftieth birthday when he is about to enter the sixth decade of his life. "Life is like the days of the week, each decade a day. The seventh decade/day is our soul's Sabbath, and we are granted but seven days. I am at the brink of Friday, Erev Shabbat, for my tired spirit. I pray that my Friday be a proper preparation, that I can use it for personal repair. For five days I have wandered, nay strayed. This day I hope to re-discover the path, and return before Sabbath Eve's suns sets."

The journey of Zeitlin's life was a tortuous one, and its theme was perpetual search. He wandered from shtetl and cheder to Western European philosophy; from secular Zionism to Chassidism; from Warsaw's literary circles to its shtieblach; and ultimately to Treblinka. But his poetry, especially the one I translated above, displays an exquisite time-consciousness, an awareness of how fleeting our lives are, and we must work hard to fill them with meaning.

Every seventh year is a sabbatical for the soul, and every fiftieth year, a time to recognize that we are past the zenith of our arc of life.

Fortunately, we have an even more frequent gift of time, and it is our weekly Sabbatical,Shabbat Kodesh, the Holy Sabbath. In the cycles characterized by the number seven, we have seven years, seven sets of seven years, and the seven days of the week. Jewish mysticism offers us a multitude of meanings for the number seven, but this much is not mysterious: There is a rhythm to our lives, and part of that rhythm calls for regular times for reflection and renewal. The intervals between such moments vary greatly in their duration. It is up for us to make the most of those moments, whether they last a day or a year.

I once heard a wise man, Rav Elya Lapian, say: "Modern man is convinced that 'time is money'. Spiritual man knows that 'time is life.'"

Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand

The Appropriate Time and Place for Not Having Bitachon

Parshas Behar begins with an extensive treatment of the halachos of Shemitah and Yovel [the Sabbatical and Jubilee years]. The Torah promises that those who keep the laws of Shemitah will be blessed with a bumper crop in the sixth year to compensate for the lack of harvest in the seventh year.

Immediately after the section dealing with Shemitah/Yovel we read [Vayikra 25:25], "If your brother becomes impoverished and sells of his ancestral heritage, his redeemer who is closest to him shall come and redeem his brother's sale." There is a halacha in the Torah that if a person really falls on hard times and then, as a measure of last resort, needs to sell his ancestral property in Eretz Yisrael, ideally, a relative who can afford to do so should come and try to buy back the family property from the purchaser.

We wish to explain two things. First, why does this parsha immediately follow the laws of Shemitah? Second, the Medrash comments on the words, "If your brother becomes poor," by stating, "About this case it is written, 'Happy is he who understands the poor person.'" [Tehillim 41:2] Why does the Medrash make this comment on this particular pasuk? How does this relate to a person who understands the plight of the needy?

I saw a drasha quoted in the name of "Rav Yaakov, Dayan of the Holy Community of Vilna." This individual is Rav Yaakov Yosef [1840-1902] who later became the one and only Chief Rabbi of New York City. He was an outstanding Talmid Chochom and a gifted speaker. He came to New York from Vilna during the late 1800s. The intense difficulties he encountered there drove him to his grave and no one ever assumed the position of Chief Rabbi of New York City again.

He delivered this drasha in 5645 (1885), to a "Somech Noflim" organization in Vilna, before he came to America. He expounded on both of these points: The explanation of the juxtaposition of the Sabbatical year with the situation of one who becomes poor, as well as its relevance to the pasuk in Tehillim "Ashrei maskil el dal". He explains a phenomenon which we are all aware of – namely, that human beings are capable of contradictory emotions. We can feel one way one day, and a totally different way another day. At the same time, we can have great fear and great confidence. Sometimes we are extremely happy; at other times, we are extremely depressed.

Among the contradictory emotions that people are capable of feeling are the emotions of bitachon[confidence] and daygah [anxiety]. One day we can feel confident that the Ribono shel Olam will take care of us and that whatever happens to us is ultimately good for us. "I have nothing to worry about because the Almighty is in charge of my life – whatever happens will be for the best." On the other hand, we can feel terribly unsure of ourselves and we can worry about everything. There are people who have a greater tendency to one attribute than the another. Some people feel they can never have enough money because "who knows what is going to happen to me tomorrow." Even if I have enough money for myself, I need money for my children. Even if I have enough for myself and my children, I want to leave something over for my grandchildren. Some people are never satisfied. They are always worried. What is going to be? What is going to be?

On the other hand, some people are so serene about life. They can literally not know the source of their next meal, but they approach that fact with calm and equanimity. Rav Yaakov Yosef says that usually a person worries about himself. However, the same person is a master of confidence about someone else. Regarding myself, "I need to worry about my retirement, my children and my grandchildren." However, when I am approached about a family in the community who is in dire straits, who is going to be foreclosed and who cannot put food on the table for the children, the attitude is "Nu – Hashem will help, we need to have bitachon!"

This phenomenon is not uncommon. Says Rav Yaakov Yosef – if truth be told, it should be the exact opposite. Regarding oneself, a person should have confidence that the Ribono shel Olam will take care of everything; regarding one's neighbor, one should not be such a "ba'al bitachon."

I once heard in the name of a great person that every middah a human being can experience has its proper time and place. If so, what is the proper time and place for the middah of kefirah [heresy – saying there is no G-d]? Such an emotion exists. When is a person supposed to use it? This great person said that this emotion is appropriate for your friend's problems. Upon hearing about your friend's financial or other problems, you should not proclaim, "There is a G-d in this world. He will take care of him!" Rather, this is the appropriate time for heresy, agnosticism, and questioning whether G-d will in fact take care of him! That is when you should be thinking, "I cannot rely upon G-d. I need to take care of this fellow myself!"

Rav Yaakov Yosef explains that this is the interpretation of the Medrash. The citing of the pasuk "Happy is the one who understands the poor person" in connection with the pasuk "When your brother becomes poor…" teaches that a person needs to understand the plight of the poor. In other words, I know what it means not to have food on the table; I know what it means not to be able to pay the mortgage; I know what it means that my children will not be accepted into school because I cannot pay the tuition. I know his situation, and I do not say "Don't worry, the Almighty will take care of you."

Rav Yaakov Yosef further explains the juxtaposition between the parsha of Shemitah and the parsha of "When your brother becomes poor…"

The meforshim say that Shemitah is the prototype of bitachon in the Torah. A person needs to realize that his livelihood comes from the Ribono shel Olam. To prove it, for one year out of seven, he does not plant anything, and

nevertheless he survives. After Shemitah, a person can proclaim "I have bitachon. I put my money where my mouth was. I did not plant. I had full faith in the Almighty and I did what he asked me to."

When the Shemitah year ends, after a person celebrates his successful survival of the "Shemitah test," perhaps he will hear about someone who is hard on his luck. Times are so bad for him that he needs to sell his house. Should the post Shemitah farmer say to this bankrupt person "Don't worry! See, I was not worried. I took off a year from planting and it worked for me!?" The Torah says, "No." A person needs to understand the plight of the poor (be 'maskil el dal'). Regarding yourself, bitachon is most appropriate. Regarding someone else's problems, skepticism regarding help from the Almighty is appropriate.

Do not pat yourself on the back and bask in your having had success with your Shemitah experience. Regarding your fellow man, understand his plight, put aside the attribute of bitachon and bring out the attribute of theological doubt. Regarding somebody else, the proper attitude is "I need to provide, and if I do not, who will provide for him?"

The Reward Does Not Fall Far from the Apple Sanctity

A person by the name of Rav Asher Anschel Eckstein, a Dayan in the Belzer Community in Jerusalem, told over the following story, which he heard with his own ears from the family members involved in the story.

Parshas Behar contains the mitzvah of Shemitah. On the seventh year a person may not plant, and anything that grows needs to become ownerless (hefker) after a certain point. What is even more amazing is that any produce that grows on its own in the Sabbatical year is sanctified (kodesh). In chutz L'Aretz, these laws do not directly affect us, but imagine this: A cucumber that is kodesh! A cucumber peel that is holy! An apple peel that needs to be treated with sanctity, as if it was a sefer!

This is an amazing thing. All the produce that grows in the seventh year must be treated with holiness. The story is as follows:

A woman in the holy city of Jerusalem had a housekeeper who was a foreign national, not an Israeli citizen, not Jewish, simply a non-Jewish foreign worker. She had been working for this Jewish woman for some time. One day she said to her employer, "I am leaving Israel, I am going back home to my native country." The Jewish homemaker wanted to give her long time housekeeper a going away present as a token of appreciation for her many years of good service.

She searched her house high and low for some kind of appropriate gift but could not find anything that seemed suitable. Finally, she told her: "You know what, I would like to show my appreciation for your years of loyalty to our family – please take this bag of apples for your family." This was not much of a going away present, but it was all she had at the moment when she needed to come up with something.

The homemaker's husband came home a short time later and his wife told him "Our cleaning lady is going home to Thailand, so I gave her a bag of apples as a going away present." He was horrified: "You gave her a bag of apples? It is Shemitah! Those apples have kedusha, how can we give her the apples? She does not know how to handle fruit with Shemitah sanctity properly. Furthermore, Shemitah fruit may not be taken to chutz l'Aretz. They must stay in Eretz Yisroel!

The wife said, "Oh, my gosh! I forgot! I will run after her and get back those apples. I know what bus she takes. I will run to the bus stop and catch her." She ran out of her house, ran to the bus stop just as the bus with her cleaning lady was pulling away from the stop. People asked her, "What is the problem?" She answered that she needed to catch someone on that bus. They told her that the bus took a circuitous route and that if she ran ahead to another stop, not far away she could expect the bus to be there in ten minutes.

She ran huffing and puffing to that next bus stop and once again, as soon as she got there the bus started pulling away. She started waving frantically to the bus that she needed to get on. The Israelis on the bus saw her waving and yelled to the bus driver "Atzor! Atzor!" [Stop! Stop!]. Finally, the driver stopped the bus and the breathless housewife boarded the bus. She looked around and finally spotted at the back of the bus her housekeeper from Thailand! She ran over to her and the housekeeper started crying! The housekeeper tearfully said, "I'm sorry! I am sorry! Here it is!"

Apparently, the homemaker took her own going away present. She went into the woman's jewelry box and took her most expensive jewelry. She assumed that her employer was running after her to get her jewelry back. She said, "Here is the jewelry! Here are the apples! Just don't tell the police!" The Jewish woman said, "Okay. I won't tell the police."

Because of being particular about the sanctity of Shemitah fruits – that they should not be abused and should be treated with Shemitah sanctity – the Ribono shel Olam rewarded this woman on the spot, and she was able to get back the jewelry that she had not yet discovered was missing.

Dvar Torah
Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

We are defined by our capacity to give…
Those who acquire slaves, acquire masters for themselves. That is how the Talmud explains the concept of the 'eved ivri', the Hebrew slave which is referred to in parashat Behar. Actually, such a person was far from being a slave – he was more like a daytime worker with many privileges. Parashat Behar gives us a mitzvah relating to the 'yovel', the jubilee year, 'ukratem dror' you must proclaim liberty for every person in the land. It was a year through which the people were going to experience their freedom, and as a result they needed to free their slaves. Rashi explains that this even included a slave who had not yet served the regular six years. It also included one who had elected to stay on beyond six years! All slaves had to be freed.

The Pnei Yehoshua gives a beautiful perush. He tells us that in order to experience and appreciate our freedom, we needed to give freedom to others. You can only truly value freedom for yourself if you value the freedom that others are entitled to. We find the same principle in other areas of human activity. For example with regard to the concept of honour, in Pirkei Avot the question is asked "eizehu mechubad", who is an honourable person? And the answer is "hamechabd et habriyot" – it's somebody who honours others. You are the most honourable person if you respect the honour that's due to other people.

Perhaps the finest example of all comes from the name 'Moshe'. Why was Moses given that name? The Torah says "Ki min ha'mayim meshitiyhu", it is because he was drawn out of water – Pharaoh's daughter saved his life, when as a baby he was taken from the waters of the Nile. But in that case, his name should have been 'Mashui' – 'the one who was drawn'. 'Moshe' means the one who draws others out! This indicates that Moshe would receive inspiration from his own experiences having been drawn out but also devote his life to draw others out of water and out of trouble. This is what inspired him to lead our people through the waters of the Red Sea and also to draw water out of a rock for the people to drink. He felt that he had been saved only so that he might use his capacity to save the lives of others.

Therefore we learn that you are truly free if you give freedom to others. You are only truly honourable if you honour others. You can only truly experience and appreciate life if you give life to others. Therefore what defines us as human beings is not so much what we have, but rather what we give to the world around us.

Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel
Encyclopedia of Jewish Values*

Making Someone Feel Bad

In the 14th and 17th verses of our Parsha, the Torah uses the same verb forbidden "something" against another Jew. The verb is Lo Tonu, which is exceedingly difficult to translate precisely, and, thus, has been translated variously as "do not defraud," "do not oppress," "do not take advantage," "do not wrong," and "do not put

others down". I simply translate it in a very unscholarly manner - do not make others feel bad, which should be made clear by the end of this Dvar Torah. . The Talmud (Rashi commentary on Leviticus 25:17 based on Bava Metzia 58b) describes the first verse as referring to overcharging someone in a financial transaction, while the second verse refers to using words to make a person feel bad. Onaat Devarim is simply "intentionally hurting another person through words." What exactly is this sin of saying something that causes someone to feel bad? If the words are true, is it a sin at all?? How can we specifically define this concept in Jewish law? Finally, how severe is this sin on the scale of Jewish transgressions?

Hurting Others With Words – in the Torah and the Definition

When Rashi explains this verse he brings two different cases that cause distress to a person and represent the sin. First he says it is forbidden to "Yaknit" which is most accurately translated as teasing a person – i.e., making the person feel anguish by saying something that will distress him. The second example is asking the advice of a person in an area that he or she has absolutely no knowledge or expertise. Like the teasing, this will eventually expose the person, make him or her feel embarrassed and cause psychological pain. Therefore, both types of "Onaah-grief" cause a person needless distress – one financial and the other psychological – are forbidden.

Some specific cases of verbal "Onaah-grief" are pointed out in the Mishna, while others are expanded upon in the Talmud. The Mishna states (Mishna Bava Metzia 4:10) that it is a sin of Onaah to enter a store and ask the salesperson the price of an item if the customer has absolutely no intention at all to buy the merchandise (before Internet we used to call window-shopping). According to most opinions, this will unnecessarily cause distress to the salesperson, who now expects to possibly make a sale, but there is actually no chance of that happening. The second example of the Mishna is more clear-cut: it is forbidden to tell a newly religious person (Baal Teshuva) "I remember when you were a sinner," as this will cause the person unnecessary distress and psychological pain. Similarly, concludes the Mishna, a person may not remind the son of converts that his parents were sinners before they converted.

The Talmud (Bava Metzia 58b) adds more cases explaining what is considered the sin of verbal Onaah. If someone legitimately converts to Judaism (this would also apply to a newly religious person), it is forbidden to taunt this person and ask: "the same lips that ate non-Kosher food now wants to learn the holy Torah?." The Talmud continues and says that if someone is suffering terribly in life, either experiencing debilitating sickness or he has buried his children, for instance, it is forbidden to go over to this person (as did the friends of Job did) and say "Do you know why you suffered? It was a punishment for your actions." (It is important to note that just as the friends of Job were mistaken in explaining his suffering, so too, people who try to explain the reason for anyone else's pain are usually wrong, and that is another reason why it is forbidden.) Another example cited by the Talmud is the situation where a person wants to buy wheat, and you send him (as a joke) to a person whom you know never sold wheat in his life. It causes distress to both the person desiring to purchase the wheat, wasting his time, as well as the person to whom he was referred. Finally, the Talmud states that the verse prohibiting verbal distress intentionally concludes with the words, "You shall fear God, I am the Lord." Rashi, both on the verse and in the Talmud, explains this idea more deeply (Rash commentary on Leviticus 25:17 and on Bava Metzia 58b s.v. "She-Harai"), amplified by my late teacher and "friend" Nechama Leibowitz ZT"L. . In many of the circumstances described above, it is impossible to detect the actual intention of the person causing the verbal distress. In the case of the wheat, for example, the person may later say, "I really thought he did sell wheat," and no one can know for sure what was in that person's heart. Therefore, in these cases the verse states "you shall fear your God, I am the Lord." This indicates that there are only two who truly know the person's intention – God and that person. God will indeed punish the person, even though no human court can ever punish that individual, as it cannot determine intention. Nechama extended Rashi's principle and proved its validity regarding any circumstance where the verse in the Torah ends with the words "Veyaraita Mei-elokecha Ani Hashem".

The Importance and Severity of This Sin

Although there are many sources (and disagreements) defining the specific nature of this prohibition, beyond the scope of this Dvar Torah, there are numerous statements in the sources that show that causing distress to another human being is not just "another" sin, but indeed one of the most severe sins in the entire Torah. The Talmud states (Bava Metzia 59a with Rashi commentary) that after the Temple was destroyed, the various "gates" by which a Jew can reach heaven and God were closed – all except for one: the gate of Onaah-verbal distress. Rashi explains this signifies that if someone calls out to God about other sins and pain caused by other people, this person may or may not be answered. But he who cries out to God due to the pain from Onaah, he or she will certainly be answered by God. Sefer Chasidim also states that he who calls out to God in pain because of verbal wrongdoing perpetrated upon him or her, that person will be answered quickly, and the sinner will be hastily punished (Sefer Chasidim 658).

The Talmud rules that the sin of hurting a person financially is not as severe as hurting a person verbally (Bava Metzia 58b). Maharal strengthens this idea by stating that causing pain to a person's soul is far worse than causing pain to an individual's money, since the soul belongs directly to God (Maharal, Netivot Olam 2, Ahavat Re-a 2). Rabbi Nachman in the Talmud taught that anyone who embarrasses another person publicly though words is tantamount to a murderer (Bava Metzia 58b with Rashi commentary) and explains that the phrase used here to embarrass signifies "whitens the face of the individual" because the embarrassment causes the blood of a person to actually leave one's face and make the person turn pale. This "loss of blood" is symbolically tantamount to actual loss of blood through murder.

Abaye says that every sinner goes down to Gehinom-a place of punishment, but only three types of sinners never rise from there. One of them is he who embarrasses someone else publicly (Bava Metzia 58b). Tosafot explains that normally a person is not left there eternally but rises after twelve months. However, he who embarrasses another publicly completely loses his or her share in the World to Come (Tosafot commentary on Bava Metzia 58b, s.v. "Chutz"). Rabbi Abahu states that there are three sins that are so heinous that God's eyes never depart from them until the perpetrator is punished: idol worship, stealing and Onaah-verbal abuse (Bava Metzia 59a with Rashi commentary). The severity of this sin is codified in Jewish law and not left to mere philosophy: Shulchan Aruch rules (Shulchan Aruch, Choshen Mishpat 228:1) that hurting someone verbally is far worse than hurting him or her financially, and that the victim of verbal abuse who calls out to God is immediately answered.

How Far Does This Sin Extend?

This sin of causing pain to others is so severe that the Rabbis ascribed the prohibition of causing pain, even if no words were uttered by the sinner. Thus, Rabbi Judah HaChasid speaks about a person who intentionally lets mucus leave his nose or does any other disgusting or repulsive act with the intention of repulsing someone who sees this (Sefer Chasidim 641).This person has sinned as part of Onaah, since he or she has intentionally caused distress to another person. Even making a face that will repulse or distress another person, without saying anything, makes a person guilty of this sin according to another Rabbi of the Middle Ages (Sefer Yeraim 180).

Sefer Chasidim describes another situation, where doing nothing but merely sitting, caused someone distress and is, therefore, a violation of the sin of Onaah (Sefer Chasidim 972). If a person is a known genius in Talmud, and he sits in a class where the Talmud teacher is not as bright or as learned as he is, the teacher will feel threatened simply by having the genius sitting there and saying nothing. This is considered a violation of the sin of Onaah by the Talmud genius, as it causes distress to another Jew. Rabbeinu Yonah specifically states that to be guilty of this sin, it makes no difference if the psychological pain is caused through (lack of) action or (lack of) words (Igeret HaTeshuva, 3) because we look at the result and not the specific cause. Rabbi Abraham Danzig, a 19th century

decisor, agrees and rules as such in his book of Jewish law (Chayei Adam 2:143).

There are two caveats to this sin, however. A person must intend to cause anguish to someone else to be guilty of Onaah, and not merely do something unintentional that results in another person feeling distressed. Thus, both Chinuch and Nachmanides stress the intentional aspect of the sin, to be culpable (Sefer HaChinuch, Mitzvah 243, Nachmanides commentary to Leviticus 25:14-15). Unfortunately, as pointed out above, it is often the case with this sin that the only person who knows whether the pain caused was indeed intentional is the perpetrator (and, of course, God). Shulchan Aruch writes that even if a person intentionally causes someone to be afraid, like sneaking up from behind and scaring him or her, the person doing so is guilty of the sin of Onaah, but it is punished by God and not man (Shulchan Aruch, Choshen Mishpat 420:34). Based on all these sources, it is clear that a serious Jew must be very thoughtful, careful, and diligent before he or she opens his or her mouth to speak to or engage with anyone.

This column has been adapted from a series of volumes written by Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel "The Encyclopedia of Jewish Values" available from Urim and Amazon. For the full article or to review all the footnotes in the original, contact the author at nachum@jewishdestiny.com

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

Rabbi Zvi Sobolofsky

The Call of the Shofar

The blowing of the shofar plays a prominent role in Halacha and in Jewish History. There are two occasions when we are commanded to sound the shofar. In last week's parsha we read about the mitzvah of tekias shofar on Rosh Hashanah, and in this week's parsha we are instructed to blow the shofar on Yom Kippur of the fiftieth year, signifying the beginning of Yovel. There are two historical events associated with the blowing of the shofar: first, a mighty shofar blast was sounded as Hashem descended on Har Sinai to give us the Torah. Second, we yearn for the sounding of the shofar that will signify the ingathering of our exiles and the ultimate redemption.

Although Tekias shofar on Rosh Hashannah and on Yom Kippur of Yovel are two different mitzvos, they are connected. Chazal derive numerous halachos based on the premise that these mitzvos are related to one another. The shofar of Har Sinai and of the final redemption are also linked to one another. In our musaf on Rosh Hashanah we reference pesukim that mention the shofar. Specifically, it is the pesukim of the shofar at Har Sinai and the shofar of the future that make up the primary theme of the bracha of Shofaros on Rosh Hashana. Is there an underlying theme that connects the mitzvos of shofar and the historical events associated with the shofar blowing?

In Parshas Behar the shofar sounds as a calling for all of the servants to return home as free men. The transformation at Yovel is not only physical, but also spiritual. The Torah bemoans the state of servitude for we are "servants of Hashem, not of other human beings." The essence of Yovel is the ability to begin again as servants of Hashem, and this is precisely what occurs on Rosh Hashanah. During the year, we become enslaved to many "masters"; we are slaves to the pursuit of worldly matters. On Rosh Hashanah we are given the opportunity to break these bonds and become free once again. Chazal emphasize that only one who is involved in the pursuit of Torah is truly free. Although we were physically freed from slavery on Pesach, a freedom that doesn't have a commitment to the service of Hashem merely substitutes servitude to Pharoah with a life of bondage to physicality. True freedom was only attained when the Torah was given to us amidst shofar blasts on Shavuos. The Jewish People is still in a state of servitude due to the constraints that our current reality puts on or avodas Hashem. When the shofar will sound heralding the final redemption, our freedom will be complete and we will once again become exclusively "servants to Hashem."

What is it about the sound of the shofar that symbolizes freedom in the spiritual sense? Chazal note that the sound of the shofar sounds very similar to the noise made by a donkey. The Gemarah even discusses the halachic implications of one who heard the shofar, yet does not even realize it was a shofar and mistakenly thought it was a sound emanating from a donkey. Is it totally coincidental that a shofar and a donkey emit almost an identical sound? Historically, there have been several events involving a shofar and a donkey. Akeidas Yitzchak began with Avraham and Yitzchak traveling on a donkey and culminated with the offering of a ram in the place of Yitzchak. A major theme of tekias shofar revolves around the merit of the akeida, and we invoke this merit as we blow the shofar of a ram. The shofar of Har Sinai was the culmination of yetzias Mitzrayim. The events leading up to leaving Mitzrayim began with Moshe returning to Mitzrayim from Midyan and the Torah tells us explicitly that he travelled on a donkey. The shofar of the final redemption heralds the coming of Moshiach who the Navi foretells will arrive riding on a donkey. What is the meaning of this connection between a shofar and a donkey that repeats itself so often?

A first-born donkey is holy, thus making a donkey the only non-kosher animal that can attain kedusha. Although externally a donkey is not kadosh, it has an inner holiness that is masked by its outside features.
Simiarly, Chazal describe how every Jew ultimately wants to do Hashem's will; although we appear to be servants of the outside world, our true allegiance is to our real Master. The shofar is a mitzvah that we perform using our internal strength; rather then using our external body parts, we blow from our innermost selves and declare our desire to be servants of Hashem. At Har Sinai, and at the end of days, the Jewish People declared and will declare again that like the donkey and the shofar, our innermost beings are holy. Like the slave who is freed from his external yoke on the Yom Kippur of Yovel, each of us is freed on Rosh Hashanah from the multiple forms of servitude that prevent us from reaching our innermost potential. As we continue the countdown to Shavuos, i.e. the shofar of Har Sinai, let us prepare to hear the shofar of Moshiach heralding a world totally dedicated to avodas Hashem.

OTS Dvar Torah

Freedom and Identity

By Rabbi Shlomo Wallfish

A person who sells his patrimony relinquishes his identity. No one would do so a priori. On the jubilee year, we realize that everything belongs to Hashem.

Many stories and laws in the Torah are founded on the idea that a person's land defines that person's identity. Cain, a field worker who was condemned to living as a nomad, reacts by proclaiming "My sin is to great to bear!" He immediately builds a city – a place that, in my view, keeps us even more disconnected from the land. Our weekly portion distinguishes between a person who sells a house in a walled city from one who sells a house in the village, which is treated like a field. The sale of a house in the city is permanent, while houses in the countryside revert to the original owners on the jubilee year.

People inherit fields from their ancestors. The land defines their pedigree, and establishes which family and tribe they are from. When the daughters of Zelophehad requested that their father's inheritance remain within the family patrimony, and God approves their request, the tribesmen of Menashe retorted that this inheritance was to remain within the auspices of the tribal lands. Moshe approves this request, too, based on Hashem's decision to the effect.

Unlike the neutral description of the sale of a city home, the sale of part of an inherited estate is described as a difficult event. "When your brother is reduced to poverty, and is forced to sell part of his estate…" A person must truly be in dire straits if he sells his ancestral estate. It would seem that only very harsh conditions would have compelled him to do so.

Parshat Behar begins with the commandment of shmita – the sabbatical year – and yovel – the jubilee year. If a person had sold his estate, that estate reverts to him on the jubilee year, once every fifty years. This is understandable. After all, no one can permanently relinquish

their identity. We belong to the land, more so than the land belongs to us.

One issue that is always tied to the restoration of land during the jubilee year is the purchase and sale of land. The value of a plot of land is based on several criteria, including the standard measures, such as the agricultural yield, location, and more, as well as the number of years a person can own the land until the jubilee year. In any case, the redemption of land before the jubilee year is assessed in terms of how many years remain until the land is returned.
The verses describing these laws (beginning with Leviticus 24:14) make two mentions of the prohibition of exploiting others (verses 14 and 17). Ibn Ezra explains that the first verse is addressed to the buyer, while the second is addressed to the seller. They are both subject to this prohibition. Verse 17 continues with "for I am Hashem, your G-d", and Ibn Ezra interprets this addition as a threat against anyone who would exploit someone else – that person would face Hashem's wrath.

In discussing the law forbidding exploitation when doing business, the Mishna (Tractate Bava Metzi'a 4:10) says something rather astounding:

"Just as there is a prohibition against exploitation (ona'a) in buying and selling, so is there a prohibition of exploitation in statements." One may not ask a merchant: 'For how much are you selling this item?' if he does not wish to purchase it. He thereby upsets the seller when the deal falls through. If one is a penitent, another may not say to him: 'Remember your earlier deeds.' If one is the child of converts, another may not say to him: 'Remember the deeds of your ancestors,' as it is stated: 'And a convert shall you neither mistreat, nor shall you oppress him' (Exodus 22:20)."

Just as we are not to exploit others and make exorbitant profits from sales, or cause sellers to incur great losses, we are not allowed to exploit people in statements. What is meant, though, by "exploiting in statements"? The Mishna begins explaining with a law that is still clearly tied to buying and selling: when a person asks his fellow man how much an item costs, without having any intention of buying that item. The Mishna then proceeds to described an entirely different class of "exploitation through statements", involving the prohibition of reminding penitents or proselytes of their dubious pasts.

Why lump these together ? We understand why we should remind others of their past misgivings, after they had expressed remorse and fully repented having done what they did; we can also understand why it's wrong to remind a proselyte of his flawed pedigree. Yet how is this connected to the prohibition of exploitation when buying or selling, a prohibition based on the verses in this week's portion?

R. Moshe El-Sheikh explains the connection, and I believe that his explanation ties into my opening words. He states that just as we are forbidden from exploiting people in distress, who were compelled to sell their fields, or unjustly try to earn exorbitant sums at their expense, we are not allowed to exploit someone else's weaknesses, and insist that their hardships are clearly a result of their own sins (as if to say: "If you've come to a situation in which you are compelled to sell your estate, this can only be because you are a sinner, and if I am the one buying your field, it's a sign that I'm righteous."). People could use this comparison to flaunt their superiority over their downtrodden brethren. This is the same prohibition as the one described in the biblical verses and in the Torah, verses that draw a parallel between condescendence toward others based on their economic hardships and condescendence based on their social or religious vulnerability.

A person who sells his patrimony relinquishes his identity. No one would do so intentionally. People who had fully repented, and especially the descendants of proselytes, have a particularly vulnerable sense of identity. When we remind them of their past, they come to be unjustly perceived as having a damaged identity. Converts lack an inheritance, because they have no pedigree tying them to the tribes of Israel. As such, their bargaining power is rather weak, economically and socially. All of the prohibitions of exploitation share something in common: they forbid us from exploiting another person's weakness, and weakening that person even more.

Servants are also people who tend to have vulnerable identities. They, too, are driven to sell something they had never intended on selling: themselves. Deep down, it's the same kind of disconnect. Servants don't have their own inheritances, and they work on their masters' estates. On the jubilee year, while the land itself reverts to its original owner, servants are released, thereby restoring the ownership of the land their families had possessed since the days of Yehoshua Bin Nun.

On the jubilee year, both the sellers and the buyers realize that everything belongs to Hashem. In the words of Rashi – "'For unto Me the children of Israel are servants' — servants to Me, but not servants of servants (of human beings)." Land can define our identity solely because it ultimately belongs to Hashem.

Let us pray that we will merit to sense our full and complete identity in the presence of Hashem, in our souls, in our bodies, and in our land.

Torah.Org Dvar Torah
by Rabbi Label Lam

The Formula for Success

Hashem spoke to Moshe on Mount Sinai, saying: Speak to the Children of Israel and say to them: When you come into the land that I give you, the land shall observe a Sabbath rest for HASHEM. For six years you may sow your field and for six years you may prune your vineyard and you may gather in its crop, but the seventh year shall be a complete rest for the land, a Sabbath for HASHEM… (Vayikra 25:1-4)

What is the relationship between the "Sabbatical Year" and "Mount Sinai"? Just as the details of the Sabbatical were given on Mount Sinai so all the other Mitzvos and their particulars were given on Mount Sinai. (Rashi)

Rashi asks a question and he answers it! What is the connection between Mount Sinai and the Law of the Sabbatical year? It is quite remarkable that the Laws of Shmitta are connected to Mount Sinai. Mount Sinai and the experience in the desert, eating heavenly bread and learning all day is a world apart from entering a physical land with loads of agricultural needs.

Why should the Shmitta be mentioned in connection to Mount Sinai? And even according to Rashi what's the importance of knowing that the details of the Sabbatical were promulgated at Mount Sinai?

The Zohar tells us that if Adam HaRishon, the first man, would have eaten first from "The Tree of Life" before eating from the "The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil" then he would have lived forever in the Garden of Eden. We know that that's not what happened. He ate from "The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Bad", first and that made all the difference.

In practical terms, what are these two trees? They are actually two distinct ways of learning about life. "The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil" is subjectivity. It is the school of hard knocks, not Fort Knox, hard knocks. The tuition for this school is free at first but in the end it turns out to be extremely costly. It's when we learn and discover through experience.

Many great lessons can be learned through difficult and even bitter experience but the fallout from those lessons linger on. Sure a person can learn who to marry and how to stay married and how to raise children properly by trial and error, but the human toll and the loss of time and can be devastating and tragic. No one wants to look back and utter the words, "I wish I had known this sooner! I could have saved myself and others loads of aggravation."

Years back we paved a huge piece of land in our backyard and installed a basketball court. "Today I mention my sin". I took up the cause

of setting in cement and assembling the basket. While my oldest son was busy carefully studying the instruction manual, I was already at work putting things together. We came to the same discovery at the same time. He looked up at one moment and declared first you have to put this part on and only then attach the other. I had already done it in reverse order and was wondering why it didn't fit quite right and why do I have an extra nut and bolt. Well I messed up and my mistake was unable to be undone. For the next 20 years it always had a distinct wobble; a constant reminder and a permanent monument to my false bravado.

Alternately, "The Tree of Life" is utter objectivity. It's a code word for Torah. It means making use of the instruction manual for life.

Employing "The Tree of the Life" versus "The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Bad" is the difference between going food shopping with an itemized shopping list and food shopping without a list. If one has a list there is a greater likelihood that he will navigate through all the tempting food isles and exit the store with only what was needed. If one doesn't have list then the shopping cart will be filled with extra junk and the cost will be high.

When the Jewish People learned about the Laws of Shmitta well in advance to entering the Land of Israel, they were in fact reversing the faulty trend initiated by Adam HaRishon. Now they were gaining a mind of objectivity before engaging a heart of subjectivity. Learning the laws and the guiding principles of marriage before getting involved in the emotional world of a relationship is the formula for success.

Bar Ilan University: Dvar Torah

"The land shall observe a sabbath of the Lord"

Yonah Bar-Maoz[1]

The seven[2] verses in Leviticus 25 that present the prohibition against tilling the soil on the seventh year are especially marked by the recurrence of the root *sh-b-t*, appearing seven times in various combinations. In these phrases, the seventh year is defined twice as a "sabbath of the Lord" (verses 2 and 4), and four times it is described as a sabbath of the land (in one phrase the root *sh-b-t* is doubled): "the land shall observe a sabbath," "the land shall have a sabbath of complete rest (*shabbat shabbaton*)," "a year of complete rest (*shabbaton*) for the land," and "the land during its sabbath" (verses 2, 4, 5, and 6). Additionally, even the right to till the soil during the six years, as opposed to the seventh, is presented in similar terms to the permission given to do work during the six days of the week, as opposed to the seventh day, as appears in the Ten Commandments.

In both instances, the seventh day or year is defined as a "sabbath of the Lord": "Six years you may sow your field and six years you may prune your vineyard and gather in the yield. But in the seventh year the land shall have a sabbath of complete rest, a sabbath of the Lord: you shall not sow your field or prune your vineyard"; and for the seventh day, "Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of the Lord your Gd: you shall not do any work" (Ex. 20:8-9).[3]

In Leviticus the seventh year is presented quite differently from the way it was presented the first time, in Exodus: "Six years you shall sow your land and gather in its yield; but in the seventh you shall let it go (*tishmetenah*) and abandon it (*u-netashtah*).[4] Let the needy among your people eat of it, and what they leave let the wild beasts eat. You shall do the same with your vineyards and your olive groves" (Ex. 23:10-11).

Any farmer would be shocked by the directive in Exodus because of the semantic field of the key words chosen to present the command: "let it go" and "abandon it,"[5] which are quite negative, especially in the context of agriculture, as in the following examples: "Your hand must let go (*ve-shamatetah*) the inheritance I have given you; I will make you a slave to your enemies in a land you have never known" (Jer. 17:4); "I will cast off (*ve-natashti*) the remnant of My own people and deliver them into the hands of their enemies" (II Kings 21:14); "I have abandoned My House, I have deserted (*natashti*) My possession, I have given over My dearly beloved into the hands of her enemies" (Jer. 12:7).

Since the root *sh-m-t* is also associated with monetary obligations,[6] the pair of words *tishmetennah u-netashtah* could describe, figuratively, the condition of farmers in the land of Israel during the Ottoman period, as Shlomo Ilan sums up in his study:

The burden of debts owed by the farmer posed a grave economic problem…When the weight

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[1] Another element shared in common is the social aspect of each of these commandments, but this is not their main essence.

[2] The New JPS translation renders this as "you shall let it rest and lie fallow," but I have attempted to give a more literal translation of the Hebrew *tishmetenah* and *u-netashtah* (R.R., translator's note).

[3] Halakhic discussions of the commandment of *shemitah* present several different halakhic conclusions due to the vagueness of the wording: What is to be let go? Is it the land? Or the work done on it? Or the produce it yields? This is not the place, however, to go into further detail.

[4] As written in Scripture: "Every seventh year you shall practice **remission of debts** (***shemitah***). This shall be the nature of the **remission**: every creditor shall **remit** (***shamot***) the due that he claims from his fellow…for the **remission** proclaimed is of the Lord…you must **remit** whatever is due you from your kinsmen" (Deut. 15:1-3).

[5] Shlomo Ilan, "*Ha-Hakla'ut ha-`Aravit ha-Mesoratit be-Erez Yisrael be-Tekufah ha-`Ottomanit*," in Eli Schiller (ed.), *Kardom: Bi-monthly on the Land of Israel—Scenes of the Land of Israel in the 19th Century and Traditional Arab Agriculture* [Heb.], sixth year, pamphlet 34 (Sept. 1984), p. 21.

[6] The book of Exodus also hints at a connection between the two commandments by adjoining the commandment of the seventh year (Ex. 23:10-11) to the commandment of the seventh day (Ex. 23:12): "Six days you shall do your work, but on the seventh day you shall cease from labor, in order that your ox and your ass may rest, and that your bondman and the stranger may be refreshed," but the commandment of the seventh year initially is presented without anything to prepare us for it, and the weak linguistic similarity between the commandments is of no avail in endearing the commandment of *shemitah*.

of debts grew beyond bearing, farmers would take refuge in distant villages. Some despaired of tilling the soil and became nomads, in order to rid themselves of the burden of debts, while their abandoned fields became unclaimed property and reverted to the state.[1]

In other words, this pair of words denotes a situation unfavorable to the tiller of the soil. The clear connection evident in Leviticus between the commandment of the seventh year and the seventh day, and the emphasis which is put on the root *sh-b-t* indicate that the sabbath provides the foundation for understanding and coming to terms with the commandment of *shemitah*.[2] For the obligation to cease tilling the soil in the seventh year is very taxing, as summarized by Rabbi Zeev Witman:[3]

The sabbatical year is one of the most difficult commandments required of the Jews. It seems there is no other commandment that calls for such a high level of devotion and faith from the entire community, in a regular manner every seven years. In the past, when the options of importing food from outside of Israel were few, when the possibility of preserving food was also more limited than today, when the entire nation lived off of the produce of the land—the commandment of *shemitah* placed demands that made its observance impossible without the highest level of faith.[4]

To this we must add that when the Israelites were first commanded regarding *shemitah* there was nothing in their past, neither in the period of the patriarchs nor in Egypt, to prepare them to accept this commandment.[5] When the patriarchs lived in the land of Canaan they were primarily shepherds and were not dependent on agriculture for their livelihood.[6] If they engaged in agriculture in Egypt, most likely they never had to abandon a field due to lack of fertility, because the rise of the Nile each year enriched the soil with the silt it carried, making Egypt the symbol of a fertile land: "like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt" (Gen. 13:10).

The commandment of the Sabbath itself is not economically logical, nor is its societal benefit sufficiently clear.[7] Hence, the question to be asked is how a commandment to desist from tilling the soil could be conceivable when coupled with the commandment of the Sabbath? The answer, it seems, lies in the historical experience of the Israelites in the wilderness. When, at Mount Sinai, the Israelites were commanded regarding the Sabbath, its special character was already evident to them. For several weeks, manna had been descending daily, six days a week, but on the seventh day the heavens were suddenly shut, after having given an extra amount on the sixth day. Yet another change took place in the order of things on earth, and the manna which on the six days spawned maggots if kept until the next morning, remained as it was, unaffected in quality, on the Sabbath. These exceptional events were clear proof of two things: the Sabbath is unlike the other days of the week, even though its special nature is not generally evident; and, additionally, observing the Sabbath does not entail any economic damage, contrary to what human reason might say.

On this basis we can say that if the seventh year is like the seventh day, then it must also have a unique quality that is not readily apparent, and in the seventh year no economic damage will be caused by ceasing to till the soil. Indeed, the economic security hinted at by paralleling the seventh year with the seventh day is explicitly mentioned in this week's reading; like the manna which was supplied in double amount on the sixth day, so too, the crops of the sixth year would be blessedly abundant:

And should you ask, "What are we to eat in the seventh year, if we may neither sow nor gather in our crops?" I will ordain My blessing for you in the sixth year, so that it shall yield a crop sufficient for three years. (Lev. 25:20-21)

Now we can understand why both the seventh day and the seventh year are called a "Sabbath of the Lord," for on them heaven and earth depart somewhat from the laws of nature established in the six days of Creation in order to bear witness to the will of the Creator who established these laws. From this we see that just as the Lord rested from His work on the seventh day, but did not stop the world from continuing to function—the sky giving its dew and rain, the heavenly bodies moving in their orbits and the earth continuing to give forth all that is needed to sustain life—so, in like manner, heavenly beneficence would continue to be bestowed on those who rested from their work and in this manner proclaimed that in six days the Lord made heaven and earth.

The year of *shemitah*, however, has a unique quality, because in that year the land itself must make this proclamation; therefore it says "**the land shall observe a sabbath of the Lord**," and human beings must let go their hold on the land, as it says in Exodus, so that the land can fulfill its obligation undisturbed. If human beings do not behave as required, the land will demand it of them, hence the punishment of exile that hovers over them, the length of the punishment being meted out in accordance with the length of time the land was not permitted to observe its duty (Lev. 26:34-35; II Chron. 36:21). Thus the seventh year is rightfully called a "sabbath of the land."

Rabbi Mordechai Yosef Leiner sums up the connection between the sabbath and *shemitah* in an interesting way:

"The land shall observe a sabbath of the Lord." The matter of the *shemitah* is a sign to Israel that *the earth is the Lord's and all that it holds*, and as it says in the *Zohar* (Gen. 3), that there are large letters and tiny letters—the tiny letters are the Sabbath, for the Sabbath is a sign to Israel that the Holy One, blessed be His name, is the prime mover, and from the actions of human beings nothing can be wrought. And the large letters are the *shemitah*, because every seven years there must be an entire year in which it is seen that the earth belongs to the Lord, and no human being has the power to act, only the Lord alone. *Translated by Rachel Rowen*

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[1] Zeev Witman, "*Mitzvat ha-Shemitah—Yihudah ve-Hashivutah be-Dorenu*," *Ha-Ma`ayan*, 34, 2 (1994), pp. 1-4 (also on the web: http://www.daat.ac.il/daat/kitveyet/hamaayan/mitsvot-2.htm).

[2] The economic damage it produced led to contempt and scorn by the gentiles in the Second Temple Period, as described by the Sages. An anonymous article that appeared in *Mahanayim* in 1949, "*Ha-Shemitah be-Tekufat Bayit Sheni*," pp. 37-41, aptly sums up the situation. (The author may well have been Avraham Arazi, author of the article that preceded it: "*Shabbat ha-Aretz*," pp. 33-36; also on the web: http://www.daat.ac.il/daat/shmita/mamarim/baitsheni.htm.)

[3] In contrast to remission of debts, for in various eras throughout history remission of debts was practiced as a means of stabilizing the economy.

[4] Isaac sewing grain in the land of Gerar (Gen. 26:12) was an isolated and exceptional event, and therefore was specifically mentioned.

[5] Challenging the institution of the Sabbath is not unique to our times. A lack of basic understanding of the value of the Sabbath can be seen as early as the Roman philosopher Seneca, who stated that the Jews "act uselessly in keeping the seventh day whereby they lose through idleness about a seventh part of their life; and they suffer loss through failure to act in time of emergency." He did not understand why "yet the customs of this most base people have so prevailed that they are adopted in all the world." (See the article by Motti Arad, "*Shemirat Shabbat ke-Siman Zehut la-Yehudim ba-Tekufah ha-Hellenistit ve-he-Romit*," www.schechter.ac.il/article 2009. There he brings additional examples of how the Sabbath was perceived by Greek and Roman thinkers.)

[6] The Israelites were to continue witnessing this truth throughout their forty years wandering in the wilderness and dwelling in the land of Sihon and Og, up to their entry to the land of Canaan (Ex. 16:38; Josh. 5:11-12). The container of manna that was kept alongside the Ark of the Covenant (Ex. 16:33) also served as a constant reminder of the special nature of the Sabbath.

[7] The *Admor* of Izhbitza, in his book, *Mei ha-Shiloah*, Vol. 1, pp. 140-141, 2018 edition published in Bnai Brak.

Weekly Parsha BEHAR 5782
Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

This week's portion creates an eternal connection between Mount Sinai, the Jewish people, and the Torah itself. The fact that the Torah emphasizes its eternal association with Mount Sinai is meant to teach us important lessons regarding Judaism and Jewish life.

There are grand and majestic mountains that dot our planet. They are awe-inspiring in their height and strength, and they tower over us, making us feel puny and insignificant when standing at their base. I remember that when I was able to visit Mount McKinley in Alaska, a mountain which rises vertically more than 20,000 feet above the plane from which it emanates, the feeling of tension was so overpowering that people in our tour group burst into tears. The mountain blocks out the sun and creates its own weather.

However, the Torah was not given to human beings on Mount McKinley or Mount Everest or any of the other great mastiffs that exist in our world. Midrash teaches us that Mount Sinai was and is a relatively low mountain. The rabbis derived from this the emphasis on and the requirements of humility. Arrogance and godly values do not coexist. So, even though Mount Sinai is a mountain, it is a low mountain, one that can be scaled and conquered. And the achievement of climbing that mountain will not produce fanfare or notoriety.

If the Torah had been granted on Mount Everest it would be unreachable for almost all human beings. It was given on Mount Sinai, to emphasize that it is accessible to all, and that even though it is a mountain, it is one that can and must be scaled, to achieve the eternity that it promises human beings.

From the top of a mountain, one has a majestic view of the surrounding area. A mountain peak provides us with perspective, and the ability to judge the world from an overview as an observer, even though we are participants. Without that overview, is very difficult to make sense of life, or to have any personal sense of serenity or peace.

The prophet tells us that the wicked are like the raging sea whose waves constantly batter the shoreline but are always limited. Mountains, when appreciated, give us the blessings of unique wisdom, patience, and a sense of optimism and hope in our lives, no matter how bleak events may be, or how worrisome situations are.

Our father Abraham founded the Jewish people and brought "godliness" down to our earth. He saw that measure of godliness as being in the form of a mountain. His son, Isaac, would modify it so that it would become like a field. And his grandson Jacob would see it as being a house. But all of these characteristics still remain within Judaism. Mount Sinai exemplifies the mountain that Abraham saw.

Life is never an easy climb, but climb it we must, to be able to stand at its peak, and truly observe life in society in a measured and wise way.

Shabbat shalom

Rabbi Berel Wein

COVENANT & CONVERSATION
BEHAR - The Economics of Liberty
Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks ZT"L

The most surprising best-selling book in 2014 was French economist Thomas Piketty's Capital in the Twenty-First Century[1] – a dense 700-page-long treatise on economic theory backed by massive statistical research – not the usual stuff of runaway literary successes.

Much of its appeal was the way it documented the phenomenon that is reshaping societies throughout the world: in the current global economy, inequalities are growing apace. In the United States between 1979 and 2013, the top one per cent saw their incomes grow by more than 240 per cent, while the lowest fifth experienced a rise of only 10 per cent.[2] More striking still is the difference in capital income from assets such as housing, stocks and bonds, where the top one per cent have seen a growth of 300 per cent, and the bottom fifth have suffered a fall of 60 per cent. In global terms, the combined wealth of the richest 85 individuals is equal to the total of the poorest 3.5 billion – half the population of the world.[3]

Picketty's contribution was to show why this has happened. The market economy, he argues, tends to makes us more and less equal at the same time: more equal because it spreads education, knowledge and skills more widely than in the past, but less equal because over time, especially in mature economies, the rate of return on capital tends to outpace the rate of growth of income and output. Those who own capital assets grow richer, faster than those who rely entirely on income from their labour. The increase in inequality is, he says, "potentially threatening to democratic societies and to the values of social justice on which they are based."

This is the latest chapter in a very old story indeed. Isaiah Berlin made the point that not all values can co-exist – in this case, freedom and equality.[4] You can have one or the other but not both: the more economic freedom, the less equality; the more equality, the less freedom. That was the key conflict of the Cold War era, between capitalism and communism. Communism lost the battle. In the 1980s, under Ronald Reagan in America, Margaret Thatcher in Britain, markets were liberalised, and by the end of the decade the Soviet Union had collapsed. But unfettered economic freedom produces its own discontents, and Picketty's book is one of several warning signs.

All of this makes the social legislation of parshat Behar a text for our time, because the Torah is profoundly concerned, not just with economics, but with the more fundamental moral and human issues. What kind of society do we seek? What social order best does justice to human dignity and the delicate bonds linking us to one another and to God?

What makes Judaism distinctive is its commitment to both freedom and equality, while at the same time recognising the tension between them. The opening chapters of Genesis describe the consequences of God's gift to humans of individual freedom. But since we are social animals, we need also collective freedom. Hence the significance of the opening chapters of Shemot, with their characterisation of Egypt as an example of a society that deprives people of liberty, enslaving populations and making the many subject to the will of the few. Time and again the Torah explains its laws as ways of preserving freedom, remembering what it was like, in Egypt, to be deprived of liberty.

The Torah is also committed to the equal dignity of human beings in the image, and under the sovereignty, of God. That quest for equality was not fully realised in the biblical era. There were hierarchies in biblical Israel. Not everyone could be a king; not everyone was a priest. But Judaism had no class system. It had no equivalent of Plato's division of society into men of gold, silver and bronze, or Aristotle's belief that some are born to rule, others to be ruled. In the community of the covenant envisaged by the Torah, we are all God's children, all precious in His sight, each with a contribution to make to the common good.

The fundamental insight of parshat Behar is precisely that restated by Piketty, namely that economic inequalities have a tendency to increase over time, and the result may be a loss of freedom as well. People can become enslaved by a burden of debt. In biblical times this might involve selling yourself literally into slavery as the only way of guaranteeing food and shelter. Families might be forced into selling their land: their ancestral inheritance from the days of Moses. The result would be a society in which, in the course of time, a few would become substantial landowners while many became landless and impoverished.

The Torah's solution, set out in Behar, is a periodic restoration of people's fundamental liberties. Every seventh year, debts were to be released and Israelite slaves set free. After seven sabbatical cycles, the Jubilee year was to be a time when, with few exceptions, ancestral land returned to its original owners. The Liberty Bell in Philadelphia is engraved with the famous words of the Jubilee command, in the King James translation:

"Proclaim liberty throughout all the land to all its inhabitants." Lev. 25:10

So relevant does this vision remain that the international movement for debt relief for developing countries by the year 2000 was called Jubilee 2000, an explicit reference to the principles set out in our parsha.

Three things are worth noting about the Torah's social and economic programme. First, it is more concerned with human freedom than with a narrow focus on economic equality. Losing your land or becoming trapped by debt are a real constraint on freedom.[5] Fundamental to a Jewish understanding of the moral dimension of economics is the idea of independence, "each person under his own vine and fig tree" as the prophet Micah puts it. (Mic. 4:4) We pray in the Grace After Meals, "Do not make us dependent on the gifts or loans of other people … so that we may suffer neither shame nor humiliation." There is something profoundly degrading in losing your independence and being forced to depend on the goodwill of others. Hence the provisions of Behar are directed not at equality but at restoring people's capacity to earn their own livelihood as free and independent agents.

Next, it takes this entire system out of the hands of human legislators. It rests on two fundamental ideas about capital and labour. First, the land belongs to God:

"And the land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is Mine. You are foreigners and visitors as far as I am concerned." Lev. 25:23

Second, the same applies to people:

"For they [the Israelites] are My servants, whom I brought out from Egypt, they cannot be sold as slaves." Lev. 25:42

This means that personal and economic liberty are not open to political negotiation. They are inalienable, God-given rights. This is what lay behind John F. Kennedy's reference in his 1961 Presidential Inaugural, to the "revolutionary beliefs for which our forebears fought," namely "the belief that the rights of man come not from the generosity of the state but from the hand of God."

Third, it tells us that economics is, and must remain, a discipline that rests on moral foundations. What matters to the Torah is not simply technical indices, such as the rate of growth or absolute standards of wealth, but the quality and texture of relationships: people's independence and sense of dignity, the ways in which the system allows people to recover from misfortune, and the extent to which it allows the members of a society to live the truth that "when you eat from the labour of your hands you will be happy and it will be well with you." (Ps. 128:2)

In no other intellectual area have Jews been so dominant. They have won 41 per cent of Nobel prizes in economics.[6] They developed some of the greatest ideas in the field: David Ricardo's theory of comparative advantage, John von Neumann's Game Theory (a development of which gained Professor Robert Aumann a Nobel Prize), Milton Friedman's monetary theory, Gary Becker's extension of economic theory to family dynamics, Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky's theory of behavioural economics, and many others. Not always but often the moral dimension has been evident in their work. There is something impressive, even spiritual, in the fact that Jews have sought to create – down here on earth, not up in heaven in an afterlife – systems that seek to maximise human liberty and creativity. And the foundations lie in our parsha, whose ancient words are inspiring still.

[1] Thomas Picketty, Capital in the Twenty-First Century, translation: Arthur Goldhammer, Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014.

[2] http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2012/12/a-giant-statistical-round-up-of-the-income-inequality-crisis-in-16-charts/266074.

[3] http://www.theguardian.com/business/2014/jan/20/oxfam-85-richest-people-half-of-the-world.

[4] Isaiah Berlin, 'Two concepts of liberty,' in Four Essays on Liberty, Oxford University Press, 1969.

[5] This is the argument set out by Nobel Prize-winning economist Amartya Sen in his book, Development as Freedom, Oxford Paperbacks, 2001.

[6] See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Jewish_Nobel_laureates.

Shabbat Shalom: Parshat Behar (Leviticus 25:1-26:2)
Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

Efrat, Israel – "If your brother becomes destitute and is then sold to you, you shall not make him work like a slave" (Leviticus 25:39)

If indeed Judaism gave the world the idea and ideal of freedom – "I am the Lord thy God who took thee out of the land of Egypt, the house of bondage" (Exodus 20:2) – how can we justify that our Bible accepts the institution of slavery and even legislates proper and improper treatment of slaves? Why didn't our Torah abolish slavery absolutely?

If we compare the laws of the Hebrew slave as found in Mishpatim (Exodus 21:2-6) to the laws of the Hebrew slave as found in our reading of Behar (Leviticus 25:39-47), our analysis may lead to a revolutionary idea about how the Bible treated the "slave" altogether! At first blush, the two primary sources appear to be in conflict with each other. The portion of Mishpatim explains that if one purchases a Hebrew slave, he may only be enslaved for six years after which he must be completely freed (Ex. 21:2). Secondly, the owner may provide the slave with a gentile servant as his wife, stipulating that the children will remain slaves of the owner after the Hebrew slave (father) is freed (Ex. 21:4).

And thirdly, if the Hebrew slave desires to remain in bondage longer than the six-year period – "Because he loves his master, his wife, his children" – he may continue to be enslaved until the Jubilee 50th year; however, he must first submit to having his ear pierced at the doorpost, so that the message of God's dominion ("Hear O Israel the Lord is our God, the Lord is one"), rather than human mastery, is not lost upon him (Ex. 21:5,6).

A very different picture seems to emerge from the passage in Behar. Here the Bible emphasizes the fact that we are not dealing with slavery as understood in ancient times, a specific social class of slaves who were captured in war or whose impoverishment caused them to be taken advantage of.

Rather, our Torah insists that no human being may ever be reduced to servitude, no matter his social or financial status.

At worst, he must be hired like a hired residential worker with you, and "he shall work with you until the jubilee 50th year. Because they [these hired residential workers] are [also, no less than you,] my servants whom I have taken out of the land of Egypt; they may not be sold as one sells a slave. You shall not rule over them harshly; you must fear your God" (Lev. 25:43).

You are not to have slaves, our text is proclaiming; you are merely to have hired residential workers! And upon examining our text in Behar, we find a number of interesting differences between this passage and the text in Exodus. First of all, in our portion there doesn't seem to be a time limit of six years; the length of time of employment would seem to depend upon the contract between employer and employee.

Second, this passage doesn't seem to mention anything about the employer providing a gentile servant as wife. And thirdly, our text does not ordain piercing of the ear for a longer stay of employment, and it does tell us in no uncertain terms that our Bible does not compromise with slavery! It only provides for hired residential workers.

The Talmud – which transmits the Oral Law, some of which emanated from Sinai and some of which is interpreted by the Sages (100 BCE – 800 CE) – teaches that each of these biblical passages is dealing with a different kind of "servant" (B.T. Kiddushin 14a): The first (in Mishpatim) is a criminal who must be rehabilitated, a thief who doesn't have the means to restore his theft to its proper owner. Such an individual is put "on sale" by the religious court, whose goal is to guide a family toward undertaking the responsibility of rehabilitation.

After all, the criminal is not a degenerate, his crime is not a "high risk" or sexual offense, and it is hoped that a proper family environment which provides nurture as well as gainful employment (with severance pay at the end of the six-year period) will put him back on his feet. He is not completely free since the religious court has ruled that he must be "sold," but one can forcefully argue that such a "familial environment/ halfway house" form of rehabilitation is far preferable to incarceration.

The family must receive compensation – in the form of the work performed by the servant as well as the children who will remain after he is freed – and the criminal himself must be taught how to live respectfully in a free society. And, if the thief does not trust himself to manage his affairs in an open society, he may voluntarily increase his period of incarceration- rehabilitation.

The second passage in Behar deals with a very different situation, wherein an individual cannot find gainful employment and he is freely willing to sell the work of his hands. The Bible here emphasizes that there is absolutely no room for slavery in such a case; the person may only be seen as a hired, residential laborer, who himself may choose the duration of his contract; his "person" is not "owned" in any way by his employer. Hence, he cannot be "given" a wife, and of course any children he may father are exclusively his children and not his employer's children!

Shabbat Shalom!

Insights Parshas Behar - Iyar 5782

Yeshiva Beis Moshe Chaim/Talmudic University

Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Moshe Shlomo ben Tzvi. "May his Neshama have an Aliya!"

Learning for Life

Therefore you shall fulfill my statutes, and keep my judgments, and do them; and you shall dwell securely in the land (25:18).

This week's parsha delves into great detail regarding the laws of the shemittah sabbatical year. Rashi (25:18) notes that the punishment for not observing shemittah is expulsion from the land of Israel. Rashi goes on to say that the years of the Babylonian exile were a quid pro quo punishment for the seventy shemittah years that Bnei Yisroel did not keep upon entering the land of Israel (in next week's parsha on verse 26:35 Rashi gives the exact calculation for the 70 years that Bnei Yisroel violated).

One must wonder what is it about shemittah that Bnei Yisroel found so difficult to observe? Perhaps they didn't believe that Hashem would provide for them if they didn't work their fields? After all, what were they to do if they didn't have food to sustain themselves and their families during the shemittah year (not to mention the following year as well, before the new crops of the eighth year arrived)?

While it is tempting to hypothesize that the reason was that a farmer relying on a yearly crop to survive may not easily abandon planting his crops for lack of proper trust in Hashem, it is ultimately untenable.

The Torah (25:20) deals with this issue directly: "And if you shall say, 'What shall we eat the seventh year? Behold we shall not plant nor gather in our produce?' Then I will command my blessing upon you in the sixth year, and it shall bring forth fruit for three years."

Rashi (ad loc) explains that Hashem promises to provide for them. Hashem guarantees Bnei Yisroel that the sixth year harvest would provide sustenance for them until the harvest of the eighth year. In other words, Hashem paid Bnei Yisroel three years of sustenance upfront and still they failed to observe the shemittah! This is simply incomprehensible. If they had the food that they needed already in storage after the sixth year, what possible reason could there be for not observing shemittah?

In fact, the question is really much more difficult. Once Bnei Yisroel were paid upfront to not work the shemittah year, how did they have the temerity to accept this payment and then violate the shemittah by working the field anyway? It seems like a terrible flaw of avarice. What compelled them to work the land?

Furthermore, in the beginning of the rebuke of the tochacha in next week's parsha, Rashi (26:15) points out that all of those terrible outcomes that ultimately led to Bnei Yisroel's expulsion from the land of Israel was due to the fact that they didn't labor in their Torah study. If the Torah already explicitly says that they were expelled from the land for not keeping shemittah, what does Rashi mean by saying it was because they didn't labor in the study of Torah?

We find a possuk (Iyov 5:7) that describes the very essence of man: "Man was born to labor […]." According to Rashi (ad loc) the context of this verse is the challenge mankind faces in contradistinction to angels who don't sin. That is to say that while angels do not sin they also do not have potential for personal growth. On the other hand, man is given the potential to achieve, but this also enables him to falter and sin.

Thus, the very essence of man is driven by a desire to accomplish, which defines much of his existence. In fact, many men who retire from work and choose to lead a purposeless life (aside from driving their wives crazy) begin to emotionally and physically deteriorate quite rapidly – often leading to an earlier demise.

This drive to achieve is why Bnei Yisroel weren't able to observe the shemittah; they simply felt horrible about being inactive and having nothing to do. They chose to violate the mitzvah of shemittah because without work and labor, without a purpose, they felt that they risked their mental and physical well-being. It wasn't about earning more money; it was about self-preservation.

This is why the Torah mandates that during the shemittah year men are supposed to labor in the learning of Torah and mitzvos. We are enjoined to immerse ourselves in growing in Torah – for when we study Torah, with real effort and diligence, we begin to understand ourselves and the world around us. We then continue to grow as people and lead ever more purposeful lives. This is, after all, the reason that Hashem gifted us the Torah; to enable us to lead the most incredible life that He has planned for each and every one of us.

Family Interest

And if your brother has become poor, and his means begin to falter; then you shall strengthen him […] You shall not lend him your money for interest […] (25:35-37).

This week's parsha contains the prohibition of lending money with interest to another Jew. Though it is prohibited to charge interest or pay interest to another Jew, the Torah makes it very clear that this only applies to Bnei Yisroel; it is permissible to lend money to non-Jews and charge them interest.

In fact, Maimonides (Yad – Malveh Veloveh 5:1) rules that it is a positive commandment to charge non-Jews interest. This dichotomy in lending practices has often been used as a pretext to attack Jews all over the world during the last two millennia.

In truth, the laws against charging interest and paying interest require a deeper understanding. As an example: Reuven needs money to pay for his daughter's wedding, and he happens to know that his friend Shimon has a lot of money sitting in the bank earning 2% interest. Reuven wants to borrow some of that money but he feels very uncomfortable asking Shimon, especially knowing that Shimon would be losing that 2% interest that the bank is paying him.

Reuven also realizes that he is already asking Shimon for a big favor because he knows that Shimon is taking a bigger financial risk by withdrawing it from the bank and lending it to him. Moreover, by Shimon lending Reuven the money and thereby losing his 2% earned interest, Reuven now feels like a charity case.

In reality, Reuven would MUCH prefer to pay interest so that he isn't uncomfortable asking Shimon for the loan and isn't made to feel like he is receiving charity; so why should Reuven not be allowed to pay interest?

Obviously, the Torah is teaching us that paying interest between two Jews simply isn't appropriate. Why not?

Let's say that a person's mother needed money. Would a healthy person charge their own mother interest? Or their son or brother? Of course not. Functional families are devoted to each other even at a cost. Moreover, a son asking his parents for a loan doesn't feel like he is receiving charity by not paying interest.

The Torah is teaching us that the reason you aren't allowed to charge interest isn't because one should not take advantage of another; the reason is because one Jew is obligated to treat another as family. This is why the Torah characterizes the borrower by saying, "You shall not lend upon interest to your brother; [...] to a stranger you may lend upon interest; but to your brother you shall not lend upon interest" (Shemos 23:20-21).

This also explains why it is not only okay to charge non-Jews interest but actually a mitzvah to do so. We need to internalize that they aren't our family. Obviously, we shouldn't charge exorbitant interest, just something reasonable that they are happy to accept. Non-Jews understand that they aren't family and, in fact, they are more comfortable asking for a loan with interest because otherwise it would be like receiving charity.

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For the week ending 14 May 2022 / 13 Iyar 5782
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Parshat Behar

Crop Rotation - *"For six years you may sow your field" (25:3)*

I still remember learning at school about crop rotation. One year the field would be planted with wheat, the next year with barley or some other crop, and the third it would be left to lie fallow. And then the cycle would begin again.

When reading this week's Torah portion, one could think that the mitzvah of Shemita the prohibition of working the fields in the seventh year is some kind of holy crop rotation. The difference being that in the Torah it says you should work the field for six years and leave it for a seventh.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

First, there is evidence that working a field for six straight years and then leaving it for one year does nothing to improve its yield and may even have a negative effect. Second, the Torah prescribes dire punishments for the non-observance of Shemita. The seventy years of the Babylonian exile were a punishment for seventy non-observed Shemita years during the 430 years that the Jewish People dwelled in the Land of Israel. We know that Hashem's punishment is always measure for measure. If Shemita was a matter of crop husbandry, how is exile an appropriate punishment? What does exile have to do with the cessation of agriculture in the seventh year? Furthermore, from an agricultural point of view, seventy years without husbandry can have had no possible benefit for the land. Seventy years of weeds and neglect in no way contribute to the lands rejuvenation, so how is this punishment an appropriate restitution?

To answer these questions we must examine what causes a person to violate Shemita in the first place.

A great malaise of our own era is the compulsion to overwork. The workaholic defines himself by his job. When you meet someone socially, the question "What are you?" is usually answered by "I am a doctor" or "I am an accountant" or "I am a rabbi."

There is a fundamental mistake here. What we do is not what we are.

In our society we have confused what we do with who we are. The underlying belief revealed here is that the more I work the more I become myself. Violation of the laws of Shemita comes from a belief that the more I work, the more money will I make, and the more I make, the more I am the master of my own world.

When a person is sent into exile, all the familiar comforting symbols of his success are taken away from him. He realizes that what he does is not who he is. Both his survival and his identity are gifts from Hashem. The insecurity of exile brings a person face to face with his total dependence on Hashem.

It is from the perspective of exile that a person can rebuild his worldview so that he can see that what he does is not who he is.

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Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis
Dvar Torah Behar: In business, we're all princes

Every single person we do business with is the child of an exceptionally important person.

This is a comment of the great medieval commentator Sforno on Parshat Behar which teaches,

"Vechi timkeru mimkar la'amitecha oh kano miyad amitecha al tonu ish et achiv." – "When you're selling something to someone or buying something from someone, don't ever cheat another person."

Sforno explains that if you were doing business with the son or daughter of a monarch, or a president or the head of the army, you'd be exceptionally careful to engage with that person with the utmost integrity and honesty. That's because either you respect that person's parent, or you fear them.

So too, says Sforno, Hashem is the God of every single human being. Therefore, when we deal in business matters with others, we must respect Hashem or fear Hashem, Who is the Parent of everyone on earth.

I believe that we need to go one step beyond this. Often, I come across people who desist from doing what is wrong because they don't want to be caught out or don't want bad publicity! That's not the best reason not to do what is wrong. We shouldn't do what is wrong because it's wrong! And we should be doing what is right because it is right!

This week we celebrate Lag b'Omer, and fascinatingly, the day of Lag b'Omer gives us a message for our journey from Pesach to Shavuot and our counting of the Omer. There are 32 days preceding Lag b'Omer, and 32 numerically is lamed bet (לב) which makes the Hebrew word 'lev' meaning a heart. After lag b'Omer, you have an additional 17 days until Shavuot and the Hebrew word tov (טוב) meaning good has the value of 17. This indicates that the whole of our journey of the counting of the Omer should inspire us to have a lev tov, a naturally good heart.

Therefore when it comes to honesty and integrity and all our dealings with others, let us have a naturally good heart and let's do the right thing not because it's a policy but rather because that's the Torah true way of conduct.

Shabbat shalom.

Rabbi Mirvis is the Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom. He was formerly Chief Rabbi of Ireland.

Drasha Parshas Behar - Home Free - For All
Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

It is probably the most famous Biblical verse in American History. Each year thousands of people come to see its bold raised lettering prominently encircling the rim of the revered icon of our country's independence. Many visitors hardly notice the verse. Instead, their gaze is transfixed upon another, much less divine symbol, that bears the painful message of that sacred verse. But the large crack they come to see has no inherent meaning. It is only the result of the constant resounding of the words that are sacredly enshrined on its oxidized metal. Those words are from this week's portion, "proclaim liberty throughout the land and to all its inhabitants thereof" (Leviticus 25:10).

Truth be told, however, those words refer not to a revolution or liberation, they refer to the mitzvah of Yovel — Jubilee. Every 50 years, all Jewish servants, whether employed for only a six-year period or on an extended docket, and even those who desire to remain as servants to their masters, are freed. They return home to their families, and their careers of indenturage are over.

But the verse is confusing. It says, "proclaim liberty throughout the land and to all its inhabitants thereof." Isn't the Torah referring to the freedom of slaves and the servants. Isn't that a proclamation of freedom for only a select few? Why would the Torah use the words "and to all its inhabitants," when only some of its inhabitants are going free? The masters and employers were never slaves. They are not going free. Or are they?

In the first volume of his prolific Maggid series Rabbi Paysach Krohn relates the following story.

It was a cold and blustery day and Rabbi Isser Zalman Melzer, the dean of the Eitz Chaim Yeshiva in Jerusalem, was returning home from a long day in the Yeshiva. Accompanied by his nephew, Reb Dovid Finkel, who normally walked him home, Rabbi Melzer began to ascend the steps to his Jerusalem apartment. Suddenly, Reb Isser Zalman stopped and retreated down the old staircase as if he had forgotten something. As he reached the street, he began to wander aimlessly back and forth, in thought. His nephew began to question the strange actions of the Torah sage. "Did Reb Isser Zalman forget something?" "Why didn't he enter the home."

The winds began to blow, and despite the chill Reb Isser Zalman walked back and forth outside his home. About 15 minutes passed and once again, Rabbi Melzer walked slowly up the stairs, waited, and then headed back down.

His nephew could not contain himself, "Please, Rebbe," he pleaded. "What's the matter?" Reb Isser Zalman just shrugged and said, "just wait a few more moments. Please."

"But, uncle, it's getting cold. Please answer me. What are you waiting for?"

Rabbi Melzer realized that he could no longer keep his motivations to himself. "I'll explain. As I walked up the steps I heard the young woman who comes once a week to help with the housework in the kitchen. She was mopping the floor and singing while she mopped. I knew that if I were to walk in she would have become embarrassed and stopped her singing. The singing helps her through her work, and I did not want to make her work any bit harder, let alone deny her the joy of her singing. Despite the cold, I decided to wait outside until she finishes her work and her song. Then I'll go in."

The Torah uses a very significant expression this week that synopsizes the true meaning of ownership and servitude. "Proclaim liberty throughout the land and to all its inhabitants thereof." When one employs he is also indebted to his employee. In addition to the paycheck he is responsible for the workers feelings, working conditions and welfare. He is responsible to provide a safe environment, suitable provisions, and above all mentchlechkeit. And when Yovel arrives and the workers and servants return home, they are not the only ones going free. A great burden is lifted from the shoulders of the master. Freedom is declared for all the inhabitants of the land. The servants are not the only ones who are "home free." As we used to say in the heat of the game of ring-o-lee-vio, we are, "home free — all."

Good Shabbos

Rabbi M. Kamenetzky is the Dean of the Yeshiva of South Shore.

Rabbi Yissocher Frand - Parshas Behar

A Time for Belief and a Time for Heresy

This year (5782) is Shemittah in Eretz Yisrael, so the land must lie fallow. The laws of Shmitah are spelled out in Parshas Behar in great detail. There are farmers in Eretz Yisrael who observe this mitzvah meticulously every seven years. It is a great mitzvah to support them financially during this time, to help compensate them for their loss of income. After the mitzvah of Shemittah, Parshas Behar moves on to the mitzvah of Yovel. After seven cycles of seven years, there is a Mitzvas haYovel on the fiftieth year.

Right after these agricultural laws, the Torah speaks about a person who falls on hard times (Ki Yamuch Achicha…) and how we must treat him. The Gemara [Eruchin 30b] comments on the juxtaposition of these two parshiyos—the parsha of Shemittah-Yovel and the parsha of helping an impoverished brother: "Come and see how harsh is the 'dust of the Shemittah' prohibition. For if a man does business with produce of the Shemittah year, hoping to profit thereby, in the end poverty will force him to sell his movable property." The Gemara goes through stage by stage. First, he needs to sell his movable property, then he needs to sell his land, then he needs to sell this and that. Finally, he becomes so poor that he needs to sell his daughter and himself into slavery as well. This all came about, says the Gemara, because he illicitly tried to make a fortune selling fruits of the Shemittah year (which are supposed to be hefker – ownerless).

The Ribono shel Olam starts punishing him, but he does not get the message. He goes from level to level, until he needs to sell his daughter and then himself into slavery.

Rabbeinu Yakov Yosef was the first and only Chief Rabbi of the City of New York. He came to the United States circa 1890, and was literally driven to death in New York by the tumultuous treatment he was given as Chief Rabbi of that Jewish metropolis. He was, nevertheless, a great man in the full sense of the word. They thought that such a person would be able to tame the "Wild West" that was New York at the end of the nineteenth century. He was not successful, even though he was a great Talmid Chochom and a tremendous orator. People walked for miles to hear his Shabbos Teshuva Drasha.

Rav Yakov Yosef gave a different interpretation of the juxtaposition between the laws of Shemittah and the laws of a person falling on hard times. He based his interpretation on a Medrash Rabbah in Parshas Behar. The Medrash links the pasuk "And when your brother becomes poor…" [Vayikra 25:25] with the pasuk "Happy is the person who takes care of the poor ('maskil el dal') Hashem will save him from the day of evil." [Tehillim 41:2].

Rav Yakov Yosef notes that the expression 'maskil el dal' is a peculiar use of words. If I had to choose an expression to describe someone who is good to a poor person, I would use the expression 'merachem al dal' (one who has mercy on the poor) or 'chas al dal' (has pity on the poor). There are a whole variety of words that could be used here. The word 'maskil' comes from the etymology of sechel (intelligence, logic). This would be equivalent to saying 'someone is smart' – he uses his sechel to take care of the poor person. Why does Dovid HaMelech use the expression 'maskil el dal' in this pasuk?

(I will mention as an historical aside, in the not-too-distant Jewish history there was something known as the 'Haskalah movement'. These were people who felt that parts of the Jewish religion were superstitious and outdated. They felt it was necessary to practice religion "with sechel". That's why the movement was called "the Haskalah.")

To answer this question—why the pasuk uses the expression 'maskil el dal'—I need to mention a pithy saying from Rav Yisrael Salanter. He used to say that regarding a person's own situation, he must be a Ba'al Bitachon (have unlimited faith in G-d's power of deliverance); however, regarding someone else's situation, he must be a kofer (a heretic – i.e., have the feeling that Hashem will not help and it is up to me to do something to help this other person).

When a poor person approaches you and tells you his tale of woe, it is NOT appropriate to give him a mussar lecture ("Have Bitachon! The Almighty will take care of you!") In such situations, a person must act as if he were a kofer. He must have the attitude: No! The Ribono shel Olam is not going to take care of him. If I feel for this fellow's needs, I must take care of him myself! This is the fundamental rule, formulated by Rav Yisrael Salanter.

In light of this basic principle, let us revisit the juxtaposition of these pesukim. It is the Shemittah year. I observed Shemittah. I did not work my fields the entire year. The bills were mounting. My financial situation was precarious. Why did I do it? It was because I am a Ba'al Bitachon. HaKadosh Baruch Hu promised that if someone keeps Shemittah, He will take care of him. The Help might not always come immediately but we have a Divine Promise that we will be taken care of. So, when I was in the situation that I didn't know where my next meal was coming from, I employed Midas HaBitachon.

Now a poor person comes to me and pleads with me: "I can't make it. I am drowning." A person may be tempted to say "Hey fella, I just went through the Shemittah year. I employed the Attribute of Bitachon (Faith). You should do the same thing. Daven to the Ribono shel Olam. Tell Him your troubles!"

The Torah says, do not act like that. "When your brother becomes poor and comes to you" – you need to take care of him. That is why, says Rav Yakov Yosef, the pasuk in Tehillim uses the expression Maskil el Dal. Do not give him your pious sermon about having faith. Use logic (sechel) rather than religious conviction here. This fellow has debt. The creditors are at his doorstep. They want to take away his house. Now is not the time for moral platitudes and theological lessons. Now is the time to write the fellow a generous check! A check is what keeps the creditors away from the fellow's door. Happy is the one who is Maskil el Dal. When it comes to the poor, be a Maskil, as it were. Be like a Maskil of the nineteenth century who was cynical about matters of Belief and Bitachon.

This is how Rav Yakov Yosef viewed the juxtaposition of the parsha of Shemittah and the parsha of "v'chi yamuch achicha."

Confluence of Events Is the Almighty Speaking to Us

Another Medrash on the above-quoted Pasuk [Vayikra 25:25] – "When your brother becomes poor, you shall support him" [Ki Yamuch Achicha…] – links this pasuk with a pasuk in Mishlei [22:2] – "The rich

and the poor meet, Hashem puts them all together." What does this pasuk in Mishlei have to do with the pasuk "Ki Yamuch Achicha"?
I wish to explain this Medrash with a true story.
In Ger, Poland, the custom used to be that when a Gerrer Chosid could not pay his rent and his landlord wanted to evict him and put him on the street, the Gerrer community would get together and raise the money to pay off the fellow's rent. The tenant would remain safe in his house and would not be put out on the street.
It once happened that a Gerrer Chosid was a tenant of another Gerrer Chosid. The tenant could not pay his rent and the landlord threatened to evict him. The tenant came to the Gerrer Rebbe and complained, "My landlord – a Gerrer Chosid – wants to put me on the street." The Rebbe told the tenant to send the landlord to him. The Gerrer Chosid landlord came before the Rebbe, and the Rebbe told him: "Don't put this fellow on the street, swallow your loss!"
The landlord Chosid complained to the Rebbe. He said, "I don't understand. If the landlord is not a Gerrer Chosid then the whole community assumes the debt and the whole Kehilla pays for it. Now that I happen to be the landlord and I happen to be a Gerrer Chosid, why should I have to assume the entire problem? Why am I different from a Vizhnitzer Chosid or some other Chosid, or a non-Chosid who wants to evict his tenant? Why am I penalized just because I happen to be a Gerrer Chosid?
The Rebbe said, "That is right. If the Ribono shel Olam put you in that position, then He is telling you 'This is your problem.' It is no coincidence that he is a Gerrer Chosid and you are a Gerrer Chosid and it happens to fall in your lap. A mitzvah that falls into your lap is a sign from Heaven that YOU need to take care of it." Therefore, the Rebbe told the landlord "You need to assume the entire burden because that is what the Ribono shel Olam wants."
That is how the Gerrer Rebbe explained the Medrash linking the pasuk in Behar with the pasuk in Mishlei. "When your brother becomes poor then you shall support him." The Medrash links this with the pasuk "The rich man and the poor man met, Hashem did this for you." This confluence of events was set up by the Almighty. For whatever reason, the Ribono shel Olam is giving the rich man this specific mitzvah. Therefore, he should not try to deny what Providence is demanding of him.
The Chazon Ish writes in his sefer Emunah u'Bitachon that today we have no prophets. We are living in a time of Hester Panim (the 'Divine Face' is hidden). Ruach haKodesh is also not very widespread. But, says the Chazon Ish, the Ribono shel Olam still talks to us. If something happens in a person's life—a confluence of events—the Ribono shel Olam is telling you something. This is no coincidence. That is how the Almighty deals with us in our time. He does not have Nevi'im speak to us and most of us do not have Ruach HaKodesh, so we do not know what is going on. But events—how things just happen to fall into place—represent the Ribono shel Olam talking to us in our day and age. This is what the pasuk in Mishlei is saying: When the poor person and rich man happen to 'meet'—this was the action of Hashem.
Therefore, "When you brother becomes poor" – the Gerrer Rebbe told his Chosid: If this fellow fell into your lap, it is a Sign from Heaven that it is your responsibility to take care of him. This is your mitzvah, this is what the Ribono shel Olam wants, and it will be good for you in the end.
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Yom Kippur of Yovel: A Uniquely Opportune Time
Rabbi Zvi Sobolofsky

The first day of Tishrei begins the new year for many halachos. Yet, the laws of Yovel that appear in Parshas Behar do not begin until Yom Kippur of the Yovel year. Why is the beginning of Yovel delayed from Rosh Hashannah until Yom Kippur?
Many of the halachos that apply during Yovel are difficult to understand. A person who sold his land that was received as an inheritance has the land returned to him at the beginning of Yovel. According to the regular halachos that govern dinei mammonos (monetary law) this is incomprehensible. Once a sale of property occurs, it can never be revoked without the consent of the buyer. Yovel also frees slaves who previously had agreed to remain as slaves. After six years of servitude, the slave requested to remain in this state forever. Yet, when Yovel comes the owner is forced to free even such a slave. Following regular monetary practices, once a decision was willingly made to sell oneself to another, one should not be able to revoke that choice. Why is it that Yovel supersedes the standard rules of dinei mammonos?
Chazal teach us that when Hashem created the world, the theoretical plan was to create a world following the strict rules of justice. The name of Hashem that appears in the beginning of Sefer Bereishis is "Elokim" which is synonymous with middas ha'din – the attribute of justice. Ultimately, Hashem merged in middas ha'rachamim – the attribute of mercy – and created the world in such a manner because a world built on justice alone cannot endure. The description of creation, therefore, describes Hashem as "Hashem Ha'elokim" – the fusion of middas ha'din and middas ha'rachamim. In the musaf of Rosh Hashannah we say, "Ha'yom haras olam – today marks the creation of the world." As such, the reenactment of ma'aseh Bereishis begins with a time of justice. Rosh Hashanah is such a day. However, just as the original creation necessitated incorporating mercy and compasion to enable the world to exist, every year we relive that tempering of justice by mercy via our Yom Kippur observance. The very gift of teshuva which is the primary theme of Yom Kippur emanates from middas ha'rachamim. According to strict justice, there should be no way to rectify a sin. Yet, on the day of mercy, teshuva becomes a possibility.
In a world that would be governed by strict justice, there would be no place for Yovel. Fields that were sold and servitude that had been willingly entered into would remain so for eternity. Yet Hashem in His great mercy decreed that His world would also follow the dictates of compassions. Previous landowners who, sadly, had to sell their ancestral inheritance are miraculously given a second chance. Former slaves are granted their freedom even if they don't deserve it.
Hashem expects of us to act in a way that emulates His attribute of mercy. There is no more appropriate time to display middas ha'rachamim to our fellow man than on Yom Kippur. Rosh Hashanah as a day of justice is not the opportune time for the beginning of Yovel. When Yom Kippur arrives and we look to Hashem for mercy and compassion, the best way to attain this mercy is by showing mercy to others. We live in a time when Yovel does not apply for technical, halachik reasons. However, the lessons of Yovel, i.e. the need to show compassion to others and enable others to rectify previous errors, is a message that is a timeless one.

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Tangible Breath (Behar)
Ben-Tzion Spitz

A people which is able to say everything becomes able to do everything. - Napoleon Bonaparte

Hebrew is a language with many amorphous words. The same word can have multiple meanings which will vary based on the context or even the interpretation. One of my favorite is the word "Havel." It is most commonly translated as vanity or futility, as in the opening verse of King Solomon's Ecclesiastes (Kohelet) "Havel havalim, amar kohelet, havel havalim, hakol havel. – popularly translated as "Vanity of vanities, said Kohelet, vanity of vanities, all is vain."
However, I was pleasantly surprised to discover that the Chidushei HaRim on Leviticus 25:8 gives a vastly deeper and more significant explanation to what "Havel" may be referring to.
He starts off with a seemingly dichotomous use of the word "Havel" by the sages who state that the world is in existence solely thanks to the "Havel" of the mouths of young students. That begs the question that if "Havel" is vanity or futility, how does such "Havel" maintain the universe? The classic translation of "Havel" in this context is the

"speech" of the young students. Somehow something as nebulous as the sounds of Torah which emanate from young children's mouths are so precious and vital that they give the universe the capacity to exist, that the breath they use to repeat the Torah they learned is so powerful that the breath in a sense creates reality.

The Chidushei HaRim compares it to God's own "breath" which brought life to Adam and all of existence. He then takes this concept to the mortal plane. Man has the capacity to create and destroy with the breath of his mouth. The words we use have very tangible, real-world consequences. We can build up or tear down people, their identity, their reputation, their livelihood, their opportunities and everything that makes them who they are and gives them life.

In the context of the Torah reading of Behar, a person can decide whether to give instructions regarding keeping the agricultural laws, specifically the Sabbatical and Jubilee years. Proper observance of these laws is what gives the land and those who dwell on it continued existence and blessing. One opinion as to the reason the Jewish people were exiled from the land of Israel millennia ago was exactly because of their failure to keep these laws. That failure revoked their right to exist on the land and led directly to their forceful and violent expulsion.

So, another understanding of the word "Havel" might be "divine breath." Therefore, instead of translating King Solomon's famous phrase as "Vanity of vanities, all is vain," we might read it as "Divine breaths of divine breaths, all is divine breath." It is a fundamental understanding that God is behind everything and responsible for everything, and that we ourselves have the gift of "divine breath" to make a positive impact in His world.

To Yair Maimon of Tekoa, for his bravery, alertness and presence of mind to shoot the terrorist attacking him right outside his home.

Shabbat Shalom

Ben-Tzion Spitz is a former Chief Rabbi of Uruguay. He is the author of three books of Biblical Fiction and over 600 articles and stories dealing with biblical themes.

Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz

Behar – Faith and Compassion

This week's parasha, Behar, deals mostly with the commandment of shmitta, a commandment that is fulfilled only in the Land of Israel. A farmer works his land and is sustained by it for six years. On the seventh year, like the one we are in now, he is commanded to not cultivate or work the land. Furthermore, the harvest that grows on the seventh year does not belong to the farmer, the owner of the field. Rather:

And [the produce of] the Sabbath of the land shall be yours to eat for you, for your male and female slaves, and for your hired worker and resident who live with you, And all of its produce may be eaten [also] by your domestic animals and by the beasts that are in your land. (Leviticus 25, 6-7)

This is a commandment devoid of economic logic, particularly when we are dealing with an economy based primarily on agriculture, as was common in the world in the times of the Torah. But even if it doesn't seem economically logical, it is spiritually and morally logical.

Why is a farmer called upon to let his land rest? In literature from the Middle Ages, two main reasons for this were given. Maimonides (Rabbi Moses ben Maimon, 12th century, of the greatest thinkers and rabbinic religious authorities in Judaism) explained in his book "The Guide for the Perplexed" that this commandment is among those whose purpose is to have us develop compassion for the weak and needy. In the seventh year, the harvest is divided among those who need it, the owner of the field, a slave, or a stranger. Even wild animals are equal to humans in eating from the field. The harvest is hefker – lacking ownership.

In Sefer HaChinuch – a book about the commandments in the Torah written in Spain in the 13th century whose author is not definitively known – a different reason for this commandment is given:

Therefore, He, blessed be He, did command to render ownerless all that the land produces in this year – in addition to resting during it (i.e. during the year) – so that a person will remember that the land which produces fruits for him every year does not produce them by its [own] might and virtue. For there is a Master over it and over its master – and when He wishes, He commands him (i.e. the master of the land) to render them (i.e. the fruit) ownerless. (Sefer HaChinuch, commandment 84)

Are these indeed two different reasons? Is there a disagreement here between commentators? It seems more likely that these are two parts of the same reason. When a person recognizes that ownership of his assets is not complete, and that G-d is the real master over him and his assets, he surrenders the social status that stems from the wealth he's accumulated, and he is capable of recognizing that there isn't actually any difference between him and anyone else, or even between him and a wild animal. He realizes he has no reason to be proud of his property. On the contrary, he is told to share the harvest with others.

Faith in G-d provides man with proportion regarding the concept of ownership. True, for six years society acts naturally, with owners of assets enjoying their property and others less. But once every seven years, man is required to remember who the true owner is. That reminds man that he cannot prevail over others because of property.

As a continuation of this, it is interesting to see later in the parasha, several moral-social directives that stem from this principle; for example, the prohibition to deceive others or be fraudulent in trade; the commandment to lend money to someone needy without collecting interest; the obligation to treat even those forced to sell themselves into slavery – as was customary in the past – with fairness and respect; helping family members financially, and more.

The commandment of shmitta is not only relevant for the seventh year. It is a commandment that wishes to change awareness, to lead a person to the profound understanding that he and others are all worthy of respect and compassion, regardless of their financial status. This is a commandment that teaches us the power of faith in G-d to create a more compassionate and egalitarian society. The impact of this commandment is felt also during the six other years. Even when the person does not share his harvest with others, he will remember that his ownership over the harvest does not bequeath more rights and that others are worthy of compassion, respect, and fair treatment independent of their financial state.

The writer is rabbi of the Western Wall and Holy Sites.

Shema Yisrael Torah Network

Peninim on the Torah - Parashas Behar

פרשת בהר תשפ"ב

ושבתה הארץ שבת לד' ... שש שנים תזרע שדך ... ובשנה השביעית שבת שבתון יהיה לארץ

The land shall observe a Shabbos rest for Hashem … For six years you may sow your field … but the seventh year shall be a complete rest for the land. (25:2,3,4)

The *parshah* commences with the laws of *Shemittah*, which require fields in *Eretz Yisrael* under Jewish ownership to lie fallow during the seventh (and fiftieth) year of the agricultural cycle. This is not the first time that the Torah introduces us to the laws of *Shemittah*. In *Parashas Mishpatim (Shemos* 23:10-12), the Torah teaches us concerning *Shemittah*, "Six years you shall work your field…In the seventh you shall let it rest." The Torah then adds the laws of *Shabbos* which also revolve around a six-day work schedule, followed by a seventh-day rest period: "Six days shall you do your work, and on the seventh day you shall rest." *Rashi* wonders why the Torah juxtaposes the laws of *Shabbos* upon *Shemittah*. He explains that the Torah is teaching us that even during the *Shabbos* year/*Shemittah*, the weekly *Shabbos* – which attests to Creation – is not cancelled. One should not think that since the entire (seventh) year is called *Shabbos*, the *Shabbos* – which recalls Creation – does not apply.

On the surface, the laws of *Shabbos* do not contradict those of *Shemittah*. While *Shabbos* prohibitions do include some agricultural related labor, they cover the gamut of creative physical labor. *Shemittah*, however, applies only to agrarian labor, such as seeding, harvesting and a wide variety of agricultural activities – which also apply to *Shabbos*, but are only a minor aspect of the *lamed-tes melachos*, 39 forms of

prohibited labor. Furthermore, *Shabbos* desecration carries a much graver punishment than desecration of the *Shemittah* prohibitions. *Shabbos* is more intensely holy than the *Shemittah* year. Why would anyone conjecture that *Shabbos* be rescinded during the *Shemittah* year?

The *Shem MiShmuel* points out that whenever the Torah mentions the laws of *Shabbos*, they are mentioned in the context of the six work days which precede it. The Torah includes many examples of this fact. The Torah seems to be conveying the message that the *Shabbos* rest day needs to be preceded by six work days. The logic that he postulates is practical. In order to appreciate and utilize *Shabbos* for our spiritual benefit, we must sever ourselves from our usual day-to-day activities. We need to establish a contrast between *Shabbos* and the workweek. *Shabbos* transports us into a different, more elevated, realm in which the worries concerning our livelihood and the physical realities of the work week do not exist. Only then can the sanctity of *Shabbos* permeate our minds and lives.

Shabbos is *mei'ein Olam Habba*, a taste of the World-to-Come. *Olam Habba* is far-removed from *Olam Hazeh*, this world, to the point that they are two absolutely different, unrelated entities. In order for one to enter into *Olam Habba*, he must be completely removed from this world. *Olam Hazeh* is physical in nature. By overcoming and transcending the physical influence of this world, we are able to enter into the spiritual sphere of *Olam Habba*. Likewise, *Shabbos*, which is a taste of *Olam Habba*, can be appropriately realized only upon divesting oneself from the six work days. Understandably, the six workdays and *Shabbos* are inextricably bound to one another.

We now understand, explains that *Shem MiShmuel*, why one may consider a remote hypothesis to cancel *Shabbos* during the *Shemittah* year. *Shemittah* is the *Shabbos* of the land just as *Shabbos* is the Jew's rest day from his workweek. During *Shemittah*, the Torah prohibits most agricultural activities. As such, the work days during this year are incomplete, for only non-agrarian work is permitted. As mentioned previously, in order for the weekly *Shabbos* to achieve spiritual perfection/success, it is critical that it be preceded by six fully productive work days. During the six years prior to *Shemittah*, this can be achieved. In the *Shemittah* year, we encounter a problem, since the work days are deficient. People might consider cancelling *Shabbos* during the *Shemittah*, since it will not achieve its lofty goals. To circumvent this proposal, the Torah juxtaposes *Shemittah* upon *Shabbos*, to teach us that we should observe *Shabbos* fully during the *Shemittah*, just as we have observed it during the previous six years.

My nephew is *Rosh Kollel* and *Rav* of the *Gerrer* community in Dimona (*Eretz Yisrael*). He related the following story to me. This past week he was walking to the *bais hamedrash* when he chanced upon an older gentleman who stopped him and asked, "Do you believe in Hashem?" My nephew replied, "I hope so." The man immediately countered, "Not as much as I do!" He then proceeded to tell him the following story: "Many years ago, I was not observant. It is not as if I was against Torah and *mitzvos*; they were just not my priority. I had to earn a living, and I was working in construction. *Shabbos* was part of the work week. Construction did not come to a halt out of deference to *Shabbos*. This went on for some time, until our son became ill. After a number of treatments, his doctors despaired for his life. Everything looked extremely bleak. Our son was admitted to the hospital in Beer Sheva, and his health was deteriorating. That is when I decided that my wife and I should become *Shabbos* observant. We really could not ask for the Almighty's favor if we were refusing to do anything for Him. One morning, the hospital called to tell us that we should come down; the doctor wanted to speak to us. We immediately got in the car and drove to the hospital. As I walked from the parking lot, I screamed out to Hashem, 'I promised to observe *Shabbos*, and I am going to keep to my word. Please save our son!' As I was crying out loud, someone stopped and asked what was wrong, why I was screaming. I told him, 'I am speaking with Hashem, pleading with Him to spare our son. Please do not disturb me.' We arrived in the hospital. Our fears were, *baruch Hashem*, not realized. The doctor said that they had just taken a new set of scans. Everything was negative on the scans. Our son was fine, and we would be able to take him home in a few days. Now you know why I believe in Hashem more than you do. I spoke to Him, and He answered me! Can you top that?"

Does this mean that one who observes *Shabbos* is protected from illness? No. It does, however, mean that one who does not observe the *Shabbos*, one who refuses to attest to Hashem's creating the world and then resting on the seventh day, should feel a sense of hypocrisy concerning asking Hashem for favors.

וספרת לך שבע שבתת שנים ... וקדשתם את שנת החמשים שנה ... לא תזרעו ולא תקצרו

You shall count for yourself seven cycles of Sabbatical years … You shall sanctify the fiftieth year … You shall not sow, you shall not harvest. (25:8,10,11)

Bitachon means trust. For a Jew, *bitachon* means trust in Hashem, because *ein od Milvado*, no one other than He exists. Without Hashem, nothing is possible; with Hashem, everything is achievable. It is as simple as that. Without the Almighty, we simply cannot function. The *mitzvos* of *Shemittah* and *Yovel* are the "poster" *mitzvos* which underscore the need for *bitachon*. After all, to close up shop for a year – and, during *Yovel*, for two years – demands super human trust in Hashem. One might think that living with *bitachon* is a specific characterization of one's religious observance, as if to say, "He is an observant Jew who has incredible trust in the Almighty." Such a statement implies that one can be observant but not trust in Hashem. Any thinking person understands that this is untrue, because if one does not fully believe with all his heart that *ein od Milvado*, for whom is he performing *mitzvos*?

We have more. *Bitachon* is not simply a supplementary positive attribute. *Bitachon* redefines a person. One who lacks *bitachon* lacks an essential Jewish quality. *Horav* Reuven Hexter (*Mashgiach*, Modiin Illit) observes that Eliezer, *eved* Avraham *Avinu*, was an exceptional student of his master. He was able to quell his *yetzer hora*, evil inclination. He absorbed all of his master's Torah. Indeed, his countenance was similar to that of his master. One would, therefore, assume that if Eliezer sought Yitzchak *Avinu* as a son-in-law, Avraham would readily agree. That is, however, not what happened. Eliezer asked, and Avraham said no. Avraham told Eliezer the bitter truth, "You are a descendant of Canaan, son of Cham ben Noach, whom Noach cursed (because of his malevolent behavior when Noach had imbibed a bit too much). I am blessed (Hashem blessed Avraham and all of his future offspring). *Ein arur midabeik b'baruch*; "One who is accursed cannot unite with one who is blessed." End of story. In other words, Eliezer had it all. As Avraham's *talmid muvhak*, primary student, he represented everything that the Patriarch looked for in a student. He was, however, missing one critical attribute: he was not a *baruch*. The playing field had just changed. Avraham could not unite with an *arur*.

What is the criterion for achieving *baruch* status? Just virtue of birth is not sufficient. One needs to prove himself as a *baruch*. *Rav Hexter, Shlita* quotes the *Navi Yirmiyahu* (17:7), *Baruch ha'gever asher yivtach b'Hashem, v'hayah* Hashem *mivtacho*, "Blessed is the man who trusts in Hashem, then Hashem will be his security." The *Navi* states clearly that the criterion for achieving *baruch* status is *bitachon*, trust, in Hashem. This implies that one who does not trust in Hashem will not be a *baruch*. Only one who believes with every fiber of his body that *ein od Milvado* is considered blessed. We can have no greater blessing than not having a care in the world, because, once one realizes that everything is up to Hashem, he will stop worrying about the various challenges that he encounters.

Many people claim that they have *bitachon* – and it might even be true. The *Imrei Emes* teaches that when someone contends that he has *bitachon*, complete trust in Hashem, it might mean that he trusts in Hashem because he is simply too lazy or cognitively deficient to give the statement considerable thought. He just echoes what others say. It is easier to say, "We are," than to consider what the statement implies. If we would take the time and make the effort to think about what having *bitachon* means, we would mouth this statement with great trepidation.

We are too preoccupied with being like everyone else that we forget who we are. Without self-identity, one's beliefs, ideals and achievements are not his own. He does not know who he is, because he is imitating someone else. If he seeks credit for what he accomplishes, he should decide who he is. Perhaps the following analogy rendered by *Horav Chanoch Henach, zl*, m'Alexander, will shed some light on this.

Once a fellow suffered from poor memory. He was otherwise an alert, caring and friendly individual. He just had difficulty remembering the simplest chores and locations. In fact, when he arose in the morning, he could not remember where he had left his clothes the night before. It got so bad that people would refer to him as the "*golem*," a sad, but unfortunately accurate, nomenclature.

One night, he decided to write a list indicating where he left each article of clothing, so that in the morning he would not have difficulty locating his things. The next morning, he arose bright and early and immediately proceeded to scan his list. He was so excited to find his shirt, pants, socks and shoes exactly where he had left them the previous night. The list worked like a charm. It was the answer to all his problems. He dressed, put on his tie, jacket and hat and was quite happy with himself until, as he was about to leave, he began to wonder: "I have located everything on the list, but myself. Where am I?"

"So it is with us," the *Rebbe* concluded. "We are not dissimilar from that *golem*. Where are we?" How easy it is to lose sight of oneself and hide within the identity of someone else. It relieves the pressure of being who we are. We can mouth the right words, walk the walk, and talk the talk, but: who are we?

ולא תונו איש את עמיתו ויראת מאלקיך

Each of you shall not aggrieve his fellow, and you shall fear your G-d. (25:17)

The Torah admonishes us concerning *onaas devarim*, which means (in short) using speech that may be hurtful to – or might catalyze negative emotions in – the listener. Evoking memories of someone's negative, troubling past; attributing the onus of one's problems to his past sinful behavior; reminding a convert about his prior life as a gentile: these are examples of *onaas devarim.* Clearly, one who acts in such a manner is himself a sick person, and, as such, the prohibition may not deter him from acting inconsiderately of others. Sadly, the only fulfillment in this person's life is the pain he can engender in others.

We can identify another form of *onaah*: self-hurt. The *Peshischa, Horav Bunim, zl*, entered his *bais hamedrash* and observed a group of *chassidim* studying *chassidus* together. He asked them, "*Rabbosai*, who is a *chassid* (how do you define *chassid*)?" One of the *chassidim* piped up, 'One who acts *lifnim meshuras ha'din*, goes beyond the letter of the law (in *mitzvah* observance)." The *Rebbe* explained, "True, this was the response I sought. The Torah enjoins us not to aggrieve our fellow. That is the *din* – the letter of the law. *Lifnim meshuras ha'din*, a *chassid* is one who does not aggrieve himself."

We can cite numerous examples of people who aggrieve themselves, who live with negativity and depression. Emotional security is the product of self-acceptance: realizing who you are and what you are able to achieve. One should self-embrace and believe in himself, so that his self-esteem will not suffer. How often do we set goals for ourselves, and, at the first sign of difficulty, throw in the towel? Success is the result of perseverance and consistency. If one believes in himself, then no problem will deter him from achieving his goals. At the end of the day, the only form of security that one will enjoy is the one that he gives himself through courage, self-belief, determination and most importantly – faith and trust in Hashem.

ויראת מאלקיך וחי אחיך עמך

And you shall fear your G-d – and let your brother live with you. (25:36)

Tapuchei Chaim derives from this *pasuk* an important lesson concerning interpersonal relationships. *V'yareisa mei Elokecha*, "And you shall fear your G-d" – How do we know that you truly fear Hashem? What is the barometer, the litmus test, that determines your level of *yiraas Shomayim*? *V'chai achicha imach*, "And let your brother live with you." If you look and perceive the needs of your fellow/brother, when you show that you believe that life and living is not only about you, but about others as well, this is a sign that you are a *yarei Shomayim*. Otherwise, you have not fulfilled the criterion which would confirm you as G-d-fearing. Only one who has *yiraas Shomayim* will adhere to the *pasuk* of *V'ahavta l'reiacha kamocha*, "Love your fellow as yourself." One who is not G-d-fearing will not constantly think about his fellow. Without *yiraas Shomayim*, one sees only himself – no one else. Furthermore, *mitzvah* observance does not override one's responsibility to his fellow. It is incumbent that you must figure out a way to do both. If it is one or the other, then your *yiraas Shomayim* is deficient.

The *Belzer Rebbe, Horav Yissachar Dov, zl*, received a *kvitel* (written petition for a blessing) from his son, *Horav Mordechai, zl* (future *Rav* of Bilgoire, Poland), asking that he not be drafted into the army. (Being inducted into the army was both physically and spiritually dangerous.) While reading the *kvitel*, the *Rebbe* emitted a *krechtz*, groan. Seeing this, his *Rebbetzin* immediately asked, "Hundreds of young men have beseeched your blessing. Why is it that when it involves your son, you groan? He should be no different than anyone else you have helped."

The *Rebbe* replied, "This is not why I groaned. It has nothing to do with our son's chances of blessing. I groaned because I sensed a greater heartfelt affinity to this *kvitel* than to the others. (He felt that he should love all Jews as he loved his son.)

A short while later, representatives of a nearby community came to the *Rebbe* to petition his blessing. Apparently, the poverty level of their community had become so grave that people were unable to tolerate it. They were emotionally distressed and physically weakened by the hunger and deprivation that prevailed. The *Rebbe* responded to their pleas with a parable. (Apparently, his goal was to convey a message to them.)

A young man studied for years to become a physician. It was grueling work, since he did not have the conveniences available to us today. He mastered the educational aspect and was now ready to employ his book knowledge practically. In order to do this, he required a license to practice medicine. He could obtain the license only after passing a test administered by a world-famous physician who could ask any question accessible to him as one of the most knowledgeable physicians in the country.

Prior to getting into the multifaceted details of medicine, the physician asked the young man how he would treat a wounded man who was bleeding profusely. He replied that he would administer a certain medicine. "What would you do if that medicine were unavailable?" the physician asked. The young man suggested a different medicine that could also stop the bleeding. "Let us say, for argument's sake, that medicine is also inaccessible. What would you then do?" The young hopeful replied, "I would burn a piece of cloth and apply it directly to the wound." "If that, too, were not available – no medicine, no cloth – now what?" the physician asked. The young man replied, "I have never been confronted with such a situation. If I have no medicine and no cloth, I would be hard-pressed to save the patient" was the young man's emphatic reply.

When the physician heard this, he bid the young man "good day" and refused to grant him a medical license. The young man was flabbergasted. What did he do wrong? He had answered every question correctly. He had even answered the last question (he felt) correctly. If he were to have no available cure, what else could he do? He had spent years preparing for this moment. Should one question crush his chances of receiving the coveted medical license?

The physician explained, "If you have neither medicine nor a piece of cloth readily available, the doctor improvises. He does not give up. If you could not locate a piece of cloth, then tear up your suit jacket, your shirt, your pants! To sit there with folded hands and say, 'I have done all there is to do,' is not the way a doctor acts! Obviously, the patient's best interests are not your overriding concern. You have no business becoming a physician."

The *Belzer Rebbe* looked sternly at the representatives of the community who stood before him, "The reason that your community is stricken with overwhelming poverty is that you have no leaders/people who are willing to tear themselves away for their fellow man. The success of a community is contingent upon the willingness of every member to give of himself for the *klal*, greater community. Only then will you be granted the *siyata diShmaya* Divine assistance.

Va'ani Tefillah

ואתה ד' עד מתי – *V'Atah Hashem, ad masai*? And You, Hashem, how long?

"*Hashem Yisborach*, for how long more will You watch my pain and deprivation? When will You put an end to this? We know that You will remember us, and we are certain that once the Redemption is in place, it will all have been worth it, but when? How much longer do we have to wait?" What is the correct response to David *Hamelech's* question? Veritably, there is no appropriate response. The mere fact that David *Hamelech* is presenting this "question" to Hashem, is an indication that it is rhetorical. He seeks no answer because the "why" is beyond us. We just want Hashem to "know" that we are waiting. To wait for something means that he has not despaired of its advent. We continue to wait, because we believe with unshakable faith that it will happen. Meanwhile, we are "waiting."

לזכר נשמת - חיים ישששכר בן יחיאל זאדל דוב ז'ל - נפטר י"ג אייר
Feigenbaum, Richman and Finkelstein Families

prepared and edited by Rabbi L. Scheinbaum

Missing the Reading

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Question #1: The Missing Speaker

The audience waited patiently for the guest speaker from America who never arrived, notwithstanding that he had marked it carefully on his calendar and was planning to be there. What went wrong?

Question #2: The Missing Reading

"I will be traveling to Eretz Yisroel this spring, and will miss one of the parshios. Can I make up the missing kerias haTorah?"

Question #3: The Missing Parshah

"I will be traveling from Eretz Yisroel to the United States after Pesach. Do I need to review the parshah twice?"

Question #4: The Missing Aliyah

"May I accept an aliyah for a parshah that is not the one I will be reading on Shabbos?"

Introduction:

The Jerusalem audience is waiting for the special guest speaker. The scheduled time comes and goes, and the organizer is also wondering why the speaker did not apprise him of a delay. Finally, he begins making phone calls and discovers that the speaker -- is still in Brooklyn!

What happened? Well… arrangements had been made for the speaker to speak on Wednesday of parshas Balak. Both sides confirmed the date on their calendars -- but neither side realized that they were not talking about the same date!

This year we have a very interesting phenomenon that affects baalei keri'ah, calendar makers, those travelling to or from Eretz Yisroel, and authors whose articles are published in Torah publications worldwide. When Acharon shel Pesach falls on Shabbos in a leap year, there is a difference in the weekly Torah reading between what is read in Eretz Yisroel and what is read in chutz la'aretz – for a very long period of time – over three months – until the Shabbos of Matos/Masei, during the Three Weeks and immediately before Shabbos Chazon. Although Acharon shel Pesach falls on Shabbos fairly frequently, most of the time this is in a common year, and the difference between the observances of chutz la'aretz and of Eretz Yisroel last for only a few weeks.

Why the different reading?

When the Eighth Day of Pesach, Acharon shel Pesach, falls on Shabbos, the Jews of chutz la'aretz, where this day is Yom Tov, read a special Torah reading in honor of Yom Tov that begins with the words Aseir te'aseir. In Eretz Yisroel, where Pesach is only seven days long, this Shabbos is after Pesach (although the house is still chometz-free), and the reading is parshas Acharei Mos, which is usually the first reading after Pesach in a leap year (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 428:4). On the subsequent Shabbos, the Jews of Eretz Yisroel already read parshas Kedoshim, whereas outside Eretz Yisroel the reading is parshas Acharei Mos, since for them it is the first Shabbos after Pesach. Until mid-summer, chutz la'aretz will consistently be a week "behind" Eretz Yisroel. Thus, this year in Eretz Yisroel, the Wednesday of parshas Behar is the 10th of Iyar or May 11th. However, in chutz la'aretz, the Wednesday of parshas Behar is a week later, on the 17th of Iyar or May 18th.

This phenomenon, whereby the readings of Eretz Yisroel and chutz la'aretz are a week apart, continues until the Shabbos that falls on July 30th. On that Shabbos, in chutz la'aretz, parshios Matos and Masei are read together, whereas in Eretz Yisroel that week is parshas Masei, parshas Matos having been read the Shabbos before.

The ramifications of these practices affect not only speakers missing their engagements, and writers, such as myself, who live in Eretz Yisroel but write parshah columns that are published in chutz la'aretz. Anyone traveling to Eretz Yisroel during these three months will miss a parshah on his trip there, and anyone traveling from Eretz Yisroel to chutz la'aretz will hear the same parshah on two consecutive Shabbosos. Those from Eretz Yisroel who spend Pesach in chutz la'aretz will find that they have missed a parshah. Unless, of course, they decide to stay in Eretz Yisroel until the Nine Days. But this latter solution will not help someone who is living temporarily in Eretz Yisroel and therefore observing two days of Yom Tov. Assuming that he attends a chutz la'aretz minyan on Acharon shel Pesach, he will miss hearing parshas Acharei.

Several halachic questions result from this phenomenon. Is a traveler or someone who attended a chutz la'aretz minyan on Acharon shel Pesach required to make up the missed parshah, and, if so, how? During which week does he review the parshah shenayim mikra ve'echad Targum? If he will be hearing a repeated parshah, is he required to review the parshah again on the consecutive week? Can he receive an aliyah or "lein" on a Torah reading that is not "his" parshah? These are some of the questions that result from this occurrence.

Why doesn't chutz la'aretz catch up earlier?

But first, let us understand why this phenomenon lasts for such a long time! After all, there are numerous weeks when chutz la'aretz could "double up" two parshios and thereby "catch up" to Eretz Yisroel. Why don't they double up Acharei Mos/Kedoshim the week after Pesach, or Behar/Bechukosei, which is only a few weeks later, rather than reading five weeks of sefer Vayikra and virtually all of sefer Bamidbar, before straightening out the problem?

Even more, when Shavuos falls on Friday in Eretz Yisroel, or on Friday and Shabbos in chutz la'aretz in a common year. When this happens in a leap year, in chutz la'aretz the parshios of Chukas and Balak are combined in order to "catch up." Why not follow the same procedure when acharon shel Pesach falls on Shabbos, instead of waiting until Matos/Masei.

As you can imagine, we are not the first to raise these questions. They are discussed by one of the great sixteenth-century halachic authorities, the Maharit (Shu"t Maharit, Volume II, Orach Chayim #4). He answers that the reason why chutz la'aretz does not double the parshah earlier is because this would make Shavuos fall earlier than it should. Ideally, Shavuos should be observed between Bamidbar and Naso, and combining either Acharei Mos with Kedoshim, or Behar with Bechokosai pushes Shavuos until after parshas Naso.

Shavuos after Bamidbar

Why should Shavuos be after Bamidbar? The Gemara establishes certain rules how the parshios should be spaced through the year. Ezra decreed that the Jews should read the curses of the tochacha in Vayikra before Shavuos and those of Devarim before Rosh Hashanah. Why? In order to end the year together with its curses! [The Gemara then comments:] We well understand why we read the tochacha of Devarim before Rosh Hashanah, because the year is ending, but why is that of Vayikra read before Shavuos? Is Shavuos the beginning of a year? Yes, Shavuos is

the beginning of a new year, as the Mishnah explains that the world is judged on Shavuos for its fruit" (Megillah 31b).

We see from this Gemara that we must space out our parshios so that we read from the beginning of Bereishis, which we begin on Simchas Torah, until parshas Bechukosai at the end of Vayikra before Shavuos. We then space our parshios so that we complete the second tochacha in parshas Ki Savo before Rosh Hashanah.

One week or two?

However, this Gemara does not seem to explain our practice. Neither of these parshios, Bechukosai or Ki Savo, is ever read immediately before Shavuos or Rosh Hashanah. There is always at least one other Shabbos wedged between. This practice is already noted by Tosafos (Megillah 31b s.v. Kelalos). The Levush (Orach Chayim 428:4) explains that, without the intervening Shabbos as a shield, the Satan could use the tochacha as a means of accusing us on the judgment day. The intervening Shabbos, when we read a different parshah, prevents the Satan from his attempt at prosecuting, and, as a result, we can declare: End the year together with its curses!

The Maharit explains that not only should we have one intervening Shabbos between the reading of the tochacha and the judgment day, we should preferably have only one Shabbos between the two. That is why chutz la'aretz postpones doubling a parshah until after Shavuos. (Indeed, parshas Naso is read in Eretz Yisroel before Shavuos in these years, but that is because there is no better option. In chutz la'aretz, since one can have the readings occur on the preferred weeks, Shavuos is observed on its optimal Shabbos reading.)

Why not Chukas/Balak?

However, the Maharit notes that this does not explain why the parshios of Chukas and Balak are not combined, although he notes that, in his day, some communities indeed did read the two together when Acharon shel Pesach fell on Shabbos. The Syrian communities followed this practice and in these years combined parshios Chukas and Balak together, and read Matos and Masei on separate weeks. There is no Jewish community in Syria anymore today that reads kerias haTorah according to this custom – for that matter, there is, unfortunately, no longer any Jewish community in Syria that reads kerias haTorah according to any custom. I am under the impression that the communities of Aleppo Jews currently living in Flatbush and in Deal, New Jersey, although they strictly follow the customs that they have practiced for centuries, do not follow this approach. I am not familiar with the custom of other Syrian communities.

To explain the common custom that does not combine the parshios of Chukas and Balak, the Maharit concludes that once most of the summer has passed and the difference is only what to read on three Shabbosos, we combine Matos with Masei which are usually combined, rather than Chukas and Balak, which are usually separate. The two parshios, Matos and Masei, are almost always read together, and are separated only when the year requires an extra Shabbos reading, as it does this year in Eretz Yisroel. Truthfully, we should view Matos and Masei as one long parshah (making the combination the largest parshah in the Torah) that occasionally needs to be divided, rather than as two parshios that are usually combined.

The Maharit explains further that combining the parshios of Matos and Masei emphasizes that the reading for Shabbos Chazon should be parshas Devorim and for Shabbos Nachamu should be parshas Va'eschanan. This is important, because parshas Va'eschanan includes the section of the Torah that begins with the words Ki solid banim… venoshantem, which includes an allusion to the fact that Hashem brought about the churban two years early, in order to guarantee that klal Yisroel would return to Eretz Yisroel. Since this is part of the post-Tisha Be'Av consolation, it is appropriate that people see that our reading was doubled just now, for the sake of making these readings fall on the proper Shabbosos.

One could also explain this phenomenon more simply: Matos and Masei are read on separate weeks only when there simply are otherwise not enough readings for every Shabbos of the year.

In these occasional years when Matos and Masei are read separately, parshas Pinchas falls out before the Three Weeks -- and we actually get to read the haftarah that is printed in the chumashim for parshas Pinchas, Ve'yad Hashem, from the book of Melachim. In all other years, parshas Pinchas is the first Shabbos of the Three Weeks, and the haftarah is Divrei Yirmiyahu, the opening words of the book of Yirmiyahu, which is appropriate to the season. The printers of chumashim usually elect to print Divrei Yirmiyahu as if it is the haftarah for parshas Matos, and then instruct you to read it, on most years, instead as the haftarah for Pinchas. What is more logical is to label this haftarah as the one appropriate for the first of the Three Weeks, and to print both after Pinchas. The instructions should read that on the occasional year when Pinchas falls before the 17th of Tamuz, they should read Ve'yad Hashem, and when Pinchas falls on or after the 17th of Tamuz, they should read Divrei Yirmiyahu. A note after parshas Matos should explain that when this parsha is read alone, they should read the second haftarah printed after parshas Pinchas. But, then, the printers do not usually consult with me what to do, electing instead to mimic what previous printers have done. This phenomenon affects practical halachah, but that is a topic for a different time. However, the printers' insistence to call Ve'yad Hashem the "regular" haftarah for parshas Pinchas has lead to interesting questions.

This article will be continued next week.

לע"נ

שרה משא בת ר' יעקב אליעזר ע"ה
ביילא בת (אריה) לייב ע"ה
אנא מלכה בת ישראל ע"ה

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In Memory of Rabbi Abraham Leibtag
Shiurim in Chumash & Navi by Menachem Leibtag

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PARSHAT BEHAR

Shouldn't Parshat Be**har** be in Sefer Shmot? After all, its opening pasuk informs us that these mitzvot were given to Moshe Rabeinu on **Har** Sinai! Why then does Chumash 'save' it for Sefer Vayikra instead?

To complicate matters, Parshat Behar is only one example of many 'parshiot' towards the end of Sefer Vayikra that appear to belong in Sefer Shmot. Take for example the law to light the menora (recorded at end of Parshat Emor (see 24:1-3). As you most probably noticed, that parshia is almost a direct quote from Parshat Tetzaveh! [Compare 24:1-3 with Shmot 27:20-21.]

To answer these (and many other) questions, this week's shiur investigates the intriguing possibility of a chiastic structure that may explain what otherwise seems to be a random progression of parshiot in Sefer Vayikra.

INTRODUCTION

Recall our explanation that Sefer Vayikra contains primarily mitzvot, and neatly divides into two distinct sections:

1) Chapters 1->17: laws relating to the **mishkan** itself,

2) Chapters 18->27: laws relating to living a life of 'kedusha' even **outside** the mishkan.

Even though this definition neatly explained the progression of mitzvot in Parshiot Acharei Mot and Kedoshim, many of the laws in Parshat Emor seem to contradict this definition.

As the following summary shows, most of the mitzvot in Parshat Emor relate to the mishkan itself, and hence (according to our above definition) should have been recorded in the first half of Vayikra.

Using a Tanach Koren [or similar], scan from the beginning of Parshat Emor to verify the following summary:

* Chapter 21 - Laws pertaining to **kohanim**;
* Chapter 22 - Animals not fit for **korbanot**;
* Chapter 23 - Special **korbanot** offered on the mo'adim.
* Chapter 24 - Oil for lighting the **menora**; and
  baking the 'lechem ha-panim' for the **shulchan**.

Based on our above definition of the two halves of Sefer Vayikra, just about all of these topics would fit better in the 'first half'.

STORY TIME?

To complicate matters, at the very end of Parshat Emor we find a different type of difficulty. Review 24:10-23, noting how we find a **narrative** - i.e. the story of an individual who cursed God's name in public and was subsequently punished. Not only is this story totally unrelated to either half of Sefer Vayikra, it is the only narrative in the entire Sefer! [Aside from the story of the dedication of the mishkan found in chapters 8->10 (that relates to the mishkan itself).]

As you review these psukim (and their context), note how this story seems to 'come out of nowhere'! Nor is there any apparent reason why Sefer Vayikra records this story specifically at this point. [See Rashi's question on 24:10 'Me-heichan yatza?' - Where did the 'mekallel' come from!]

MORE PROBLEMS!

Parshat Behar (chapter 25) is no less problematic! Even though its laws of 'shmitta' and 'yovel' fit nicely into our definition of the second half of Sefer Vayikra (see Ibn Ezra 25:1), the opening and closing psukim of this unit present us with two different problems.

The first pasuk of Parshat Behar (25:1) informs us that these mitzvot were given on **Har Sinai**, and hence suggests that this entire Parsha may really belong in Sefer Shmot!

More disturbing (and often not noticed) is the very conclusion of Parshat Behar. There we find three 'powerful' psukim that seem to come out of nowhere! Let's take a look:

* "For Bnei Yisrael are servants to Me, they My servants whom I freed from the land of Egypt, I am the Lord your God." (25:55).

* "Do not make for yourselves any other gods.." (26:1).

* "Keep My Sabbath and guard My Temple, I am your God" (26:2).

Indeed, the first pasuk (25:55) forms a nice summary pasuk for the laws of that unit (i.e. 25:47-54);, however the last two laws are totally unrelated! Furthermore, all three of these psukim seem to 'echo' the first four of the Ten Commandments.

Why do they conclude Parshat Behar, and why are the first four 'dibrot' repeated specifically here in Sefer Vayikra?

[Note the discrepancy between the chapter division (i.e. where chapter 26 begins) and the division of parshiot (note that Parshat Bechukotai begins with 26:3) - which reflects this problem.]

The above questions appear to shake the very foundation of our understanding of the two halves of Sefer Vayikra. Should we conclude that Sefer Vayikra is simply a 'random' collection of mitzvot?

[The solution that we are about to suggest is based on a rather amazing shiur that I heard many years ago from Rav Yoel Bin Nun, where he uncovers a chiastic structure that ties together Sefer Shmot and Vayikra.]

To answer the above questions, we must first 're-examine' each of the parshiot (mentioned above) to determine where each of these 'out of place' parshiot really **does** belong.

As we do so, a very interesting pattern will emerge - that form the basis of a chiastic structure. [If you've never heard of chiastic structure before don't worry, it will be explained as the shiur progresses.]

WHERE DO THEY BELONG?

Let's begin with the first topics in chapter 24, for it is quite easy to identify where these two mitzvot do 'belong'.

THE NER TAMID (24:1-4)

As we noted above, these four psukim (describing the mitzva to light the **menora** with olive oil) are almost an exact repetition of the first two psukim of Parshat Tetzaveh! [See and compare with Shmot 27:20-21.] Hence, this parshia 'belongs' in **Parshat Tetzaveh**.

THE LECHEM HA-PANIM (24:5-9)

This parshia describes how Bnei Yisrael were to prepare the **lechem ha-panim** [show bread] - that were to be placed on a weekly basis on the **shulchan** [the Table located inside the mishkan].

Even though this is the first time that we find the details of this mitzva in Chumash, the general mitzva to put lechem ha-panim on the **shulchan** was already mentioned in Parshat **Teruma** (see Shmot 25:30). Hence, we conclude that this 'parshia' could have been recorded in Parshat Teruma, together with all the other mitzvot concerning how to build the **shulchan**.

THE MEKALLEL - The 'blasphemer' (24:10-23)

Even though this parshia begins with a story (see 24:10-12), this short narrative leads directly into a small set of civil laws ('bein adam le-chaveiro') relating to capital punishment (see 24:13-22). Furthermore, as your review 24:17-22, note how they are almost identical with Shmot 21:12,23-25 (i.e. Parshat Mishpatim).

For example, note how Shmot 21:24 is identical to Vayikra

24:20. -"ayin tachat ayin, shein tachat shein ..." ["an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth..."]

Hence, we conclude that the mekallel parshia 'belongs' in Parshat **Mishpatim**.

THE LAWS of SHMITTA & YOVEL (25:1-25:54)

As we explained above, the opening pasuk of this parshia states that these mitzvot concerning shmitta & yovel were given to Moshe Rabbeinu at Har Sinai. However, in Sefer Shmot, we find many other laws that were given to Moshe Rabbeinu on Har Sinai, and they were all recorded in Parshat Mishpatim. In fact, in that very same Parsha, the basic laws of shmitta" were already mentioned:

> "Six years you shall sow your Land and gather your produce and the seventh year..." (see Shmot 23:10-11).

Therefore, we conclude that this entire unit of the laws of shmitta & yovel belongs in Parshat Mishpatim, together with all of the other mitzvot that were given to Moshe on **Har Sinai**.

The 'MINI-DIBROT' (25:55-26:2)

As we explained above, these three psukim at the very end of Parshat Behar 'echo' the first four Commandments. If so, then we can conclude that these psukim 'belong' in Parshat **Yitro** (see Shmot 20:1-9).

A BACKWARD 'BACK TO SHMOT'

In case you have yet to notice, not only do all of these parshiot (from chapters 21 thru 25) thematically belong in Sefer Shmot, they progress in **backward** order, from Tetzaveh, to Teruma, to Mishpatim, to Yitro!

Even though this order may seem to be simply coincidental, the next chapter in Vayikra (i.e. the TOCHACHA in chapter 26) provides us with enough 'circumstantial evidence' to suggest that this pattern may be intentional!

Let's take a look:

THE TOCHACHA (26:3-46)

The 'tochacha' explains the reward (or punishment) that Bnei Yisrael receive should they obey (or disobey) God's laws. This tochacha constitutes an integral part of the covenant (brit) between God and Bnei Yisrael that was agreed upon at Har Sinai (see Devarim 28:69!).

> [Note that the final pasuk (26:46) is not only parallel to Devarim 28:69, but also includes the phrase 'beino u-bein Bnei Yisrael', which also implies a covenant (based on Shmot 31:15-17)!]

Even though this covenant is detailed in Parshat Bechukotai, recall how its basic principles were first recorded in Parshat **Yitro** in the Torah's account of the events that took place at **ma'amad Har Sinai**:

> "And now, **if you shall listen to Me** and **keep My covenant** faithfully, then..." (Shmot 19:5-6, see also Shmot 24:4-7)
>
> [Compare carefully with Vayikra 26:3,12,23!]

Therefore, even though this parshia is thematically consistent with the theme of the second half of Sefer Vayikra (compare chapter 26 with 18:25-29), nonetheless, it was given to Bnei Yisrael on Har Sinai. Hence, it could easily have been included in Parshat **Yitro**, most probably in chapter 19 (prior to the Ten Commandments).

> [Note also that the 'dibbur' that began in 25:1 includes chapter 26 and is summarized by the final pasuk of the tochacha (26:46). See also Chizkuni on Shmot 24:7 & Ibn Ezra on Vayikra 25:1. where they explain that this tochacha was actually read at Har Sinai at Ma'amad Har Sinai!]

WORKING 'BACKWARDS'

Let's summarize all of these 'parshiot' that we have discussed (from the end of Sefer Vayikra) that seem to 'belong' in Sefer Shmot. [Working backwards,] we assign a letter to each 'parshia' for future reference.

(A) - THE TOCHACHA (26:3-46)
(B) The 'MINI-DIBROT' (25:55-26:2)
(C) The laws of SHMITTA & YOVEL (25:1-25:54)
(D) Parshat "ha-MEKALLEL" (24:10-23) - The 'Blasphemer'.
(E) THE MENORA AND SHULCHAN (24:1-9)

And there's more! Let's continue working backwards from chapter 24 to chapter 23, showing how this pattern continues! We'll continue using the letters of the alphabet for 'headers' as well:

(F) PARSHAT HA-MO'ADIM (23:1-44) - The **holidays** in Emor

As we explained in last week's shiur, the Torah presents the mo'adim together with the laws of Shabbat. Even though these laws relate thematically to the theme of **kedusha** in the second half of Vayikra, they also relate to the laws of Shabbat that conclude the parshiot concerning the **mishkan**. [See Shmot 31:12-17 & 35:2-3.]

Note the obvious textual similarities:

* "sheshet yamim ta'aseh melacha, u-vayom ha-shvi'i..." [Vayikra 23:3- Compare with Shmot 35:2!].
* "**ach** et shabtotai tishmoru... ki ani Hashem **mekadishchem**" [See Shmot 31:13/ compare with 23:3,39.]

Therefore, 'parshat ha-mo'adim' (chapter 23) in Sefer Vayikra could have been recorded in Parshat **Ki-Tisa** as well, together with the laws of Shabbat.

(G) ANIMALS THAT CANNOT BE KORBANOT (22:17-33)

In this parshia we find the prohibition of offering an animal with a blemish, or an animal less than eight days old.

Surely, this mitzva could have been recorded just as well in Parshat **Vayikra** (i.e. in the first half of the Sefer), for it discusses the various types of animals which one can offer for a korban (see 1:2).

(H) KEDUSHAT KOHANIM (21:1-22:16)

Parshat Emor opens with laws that explain when a kohen CAN and CANNOT become "tamey" (ritually impure by coming into contact with a dead person).

Even though these laws thematically relate to the second half of Vayikra (for they govern the daily life of the kohanim OUTSIDE the mishkan), nonetheless the mitzvot that follow (21:16-22:16) should have been recorded in Parshat TZAV, for they concern who can and cannot eat the meat of the korbanot.

In summary, even though each of the above parshiot may be thematically related in one form or other to the theme of the second half of Vayikra, nonetheless each parshia could also have been recorded either in the second half of Sefer Shmot (or early in Sefer Vayikra) as well!

Using the letters noted above, the following table summarizes these special parshiot, noting where each 'misplaced parsha' really belongs:.

PARSHA OUT OF PLACE	WHERE IT BELONGS...
(A) THE TOCHACHA	YITRO (pre dibrot)
(B) THE MINI-DIBROT	YITRO (the dibrot')
(C) SHMITTA AND YOVEL	YITRO/MISHPATIM (post dibrot)
(D) MEKALLEL & mishpatim	MISHPATIM
(E) MENORA AND SHULCHAN	TRUMA /TETZAVEH
(F) MO'ADIM IN EMOR	KI TISA/ VAYAKHEL (shabbat)
(G) ANIMALS FIT TO OFFER	VAYIKRA
(H) KEDUSHAT KOHANIM	TZAV

Study this table carefully, noting the correlation between where these parshiot 'belong' and the order of the Parshiot in Sefer Shmot [and the beginning of Vayikra].

THE CHIASTIC STRUCTURE OF SHMOT & VAYIKRA

This literary style is known as a chiastic structure (A-B-C-B-A), a literary tool which emphasizes unity of theme and accentuates a central point (C).

To uncover the significance of a chiastic structure, it is usually critical to identify its central point. To do so in our case, we must first summarize the basic units of mitzvot (in Sefer Shmot) which Bnei Yisrael receive from the time of their arrival at Har Sinai:

(A) BRIT - prior to Matan Torah (perek 19 & parallel in perek 24)
(B) DIBROT - the Ten Commandments (20:1-14)
(C) MITZVOT - immediately after the dibrot (20:19-23)
(D) MISHPATIM - the civil laws in Parshat Mishpatim (21->23)
(E) TZIVUI HA-MISHKAN - Parshiot Truma/Tetzaveh (25->31)
(F) SHABBAT (31:12-18 followed by 35:1-3)
[In the further iyun section, we discuss why we skip chet ha-egel (32->34) in this structure.]
(G) LAWS OF THE KORBAN YACHID (Vayikra 1->5)
(H) LAWS FOR THE KOHANIM - serving in the mishkan (6->7)
(I) THE SHCHINA ON THE MISHKAN:
The dedication ceremony of the mishkan (8->10);
laws governing proper entry (11->15);
the yearly 're-dedication' ceremony on Yom Kippur (16->17)
AND ITS AFFECT ON THE NATION
Kedushat ha-AM ve-haARETZ
climaxing with "KDOSHIM TIHIYU"

Using the chart below [I hope your word processor is able to format it, if not try to format it by yourself], note how each of these units corresponds in REVERSE ORDER with the problematic concluding parshiot of Sefer Vayikra (that were discussed above)!

The following chart illustrates this structure:

A) Brit - before Matan Torah
B) Dibrot
| C) Mitzvot - after Matan Torah
| | D) Mishpatim - civil laws
| | | E) Tzivui Hamishkan
| | | | F) Shabbat
| | | | | G) Korbanot of the individual
| | | | | | H) Kohanim - how to offer
| | | | | | | / * Shchina on mishkan
| | | | | | | | I) Its dedication etc.
| | | | | | | | \ * Shchina in the Camp
| | | | | | | | proper behavior, etc.
| | | | | | | H) Kohanim - who can't offer
| | | | | G) Korbanot - what can't be a korban
| | | | F) Mo'adim
| | | E) Menora & Shulchan
| | D) Mishpatim in aftermath of the Mekallel incident
| C) Mitzvot at Har Sinai, shmitta & yovel (Behar)
B) Dibrot (first 4)
A) Brit - Tochachat Bechukotai

Note how the above chart identifies a chiastic structure (symbolized by ABCDEFGH-I-HGFEDCBA) that connects together all of the mitzvot given to Bnei Yisrael in Midbar Sinai from the time of their arrival at Har Sinai.

It should come at no surprise that at the thematic center of this structure - (letter 'I') - lies the dual theme of Sefer Vayikra - i.e., its two sections:

(1) the SHCHINA dwelling on the mishkan, and
(2) its subsequent effect on the nation.

As we explained in our previous shiurim, this model reflects the impact of the intense level of the kedusha in the mishkan on the spiritual character of the entire Nation in all realms of daily life.

Furthermore, this 'central point' ties back to the basic theme of **ma'amad Har Sinai** in Sefer Shmot, which just so happens to be the opening 'bookend' of the chiastic structure (A). Recall how Bnei Yisrael first entered into a covenant before they received the Torah at Har Sinai. Note once again the wording of God's original proposal:

> "And if you listen to Me and keep my **covenant**... then you shall be for Me, a - **mamlechet kohanim ve-goy kadosh** - a kingdom of **priests** and a **holy nation**" (see Shmot 19:5-6) .

The achievement is this goal - to become God's special nation -as detailed in 'bookends' of this structure (letters A), is manifest with the dwelling of God's Shchina in the mishkan (I) -at the center of this structure; and is achieved by the fulfillment of God's mitzvot of kedusha - as detailed throughout this entire unit of Sefer Shmot& Vayikra.

In essence, the covenant of Har Sinai, the climax of Sefer Shmot, is fulfilled when Bnei Yisrael follow the mitzvot of Sefer Vayikra! By keeping the mitzvot of both halves of Sefer Vayikra, we become a mamlechet kohanim ve-goy kadosh (Shmot 19:6) - the ultimate goal and purpose of **brit Har Sinai**.

BRIT SINAI & KEDOSHIM TIHIYU

The thematic significance of this chiastic structure is strengthened by its closing 'book-end'. Just as **brit Sinai** - the covenant at Har Sinai - is the **opening** parsha, the details of that covenant - the tochacha of Bechukotai - constitutes its **closing** parsha.

In that covenant, we find yet another aspect of this 'two-sided' deal. The tochacha explains how the Promised Land will serve as God's agent to reward Bnei Yisrael, should they be faithful to His covenant, while the Land will punish (and ultimately kick them out) should they go astray.

Finally, note (from this chiastic structure) how the mitzvot of Sefer Vayikra [GHI]- that were given from the ohel mo'ed (see 1:1) are surrounded by mitzvot that were given "be-**Har Sinai**" [ABCDEF]. Considering that the entire purpose of the mishkan was to serve as a vehicle to perpetuate the fundamentals of Ma'amad Har Sinai, this unique structure beautifully reflects the eternal goal of the Jewish nation.

shabbat shalom
menachem

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FOR FURTHER IYUN

A. As you may have noticed, during the entire shiur we have purposely 'neglected' the location of parshat 'erchin' (perek 27) at the end of Sefer Vayikra. This topic will be dealt with iy"H in next week's shiur. [See also Ibn Ezra 27:1.]

B. Most all of the commentators deal with the question: Why does Parshat Behar open by mentioning that this parsha was given on **Har Sinai**? See the commentary of Rashi and Ramban. [25:1 / "ma inyan shmitta etzel Har Sinai?"]

1. Explain the machloket between Rashi and Ramban.
2. How is their approach to this question different than the approach taken in the above shiur.

How is their approach to this question different than the approach taken in the above shiur? More specifically: Which fundamental question are they asking? How is it different from the fundamental question raised in the above shiur? Do these different approaches contradict each other, or do they complement one another?

C. A careful examination of the chiastic structure developed in the above shiur shows that the parshiot that we have conveniently 'left out' of our chart in both Seforim coincide with the narratives (i.e. chet ha-egel, Vayakhel, Pekudei, Shmini, the mekallel etc.). Thus, we can conclude that the structure focuses on the mitzvot and the covenant, but not on the ongoing story of Chumash. This makes sense, since it is logical to create a chiastic structure within a set of mitzvot, not in an ongoing narrative.

This provides an explanation why we skipped over chet ha-egel and its related mitzvot in our chart. [Recall that they were 'repeats' from Mishpatim because of chet ha-egel.]

PARSHAT BEHAR - SIGNIFICANT SUMMARIES

In Parshat Behar we find three 'summary psukim' that may appear to be superfluous. In the following 'mini-shiur' we attempt to explain their importance.

AN OVERVIEW OF PARSHAT BEHAR

Let's begin with a short outline of Parshat Behar, in order to identify where these three summary psukim are located, and their significance.

I. The LAWS SHMITTA & YOVEL

A. The 'shmitta' cycle (25:1-7)
B. The 'yovel cycle' & guidelines (25:8-22)
* **summary pasuk** - reason for shmitta & yovel (25:23-24)

II. LAWS RELATING TO THE YOVEL CYCLE

A. Helping your neighbor who had to sell his field
   1. one who sold his field to a Jew (25:25-28)
   2. one who sold his house (25:29-34)
   3. one who sold his field to a non-Jew (25:35-38)
   ***summary pasuk** - the reason (25:39)
B. Helping our neighbor who had to sell himself
   1. as an 'eved' [servant] to a Jew (25:39-46)
   2. as an eved [servant] to a non-Jew (25:47-54)
   ***summary pasuk** - the reason (25:55).

This outline clarifies the progression of topics in the entire Parsha, showing how the laws of shmitta & yovel are followed by several applications of these laws. Even though the economic system created by the laws of 'yovel' was designed to protect the poor (from the rich), the Torah also commands that society must provide additional financial assistance for a neighbor in distress.

Pay attention as well to the summary psukim that delimit each unit. In our shiur, we will discuss their significance.

THIS LAND IS 'HIS' LAND

Let's begin with the first summary pasuk, which concludes the laws of yovel and explains their underlying reason:

> "And the land shall not be sold [to anyone] forever, for the Land is Mine, for you are like **gerim** ve-**toshavim** [strangers and residents] with Me. Throughout - **eretz achuzatchem** - the land or your inheritance, you shall give the land redemption" (25:23-24).

Even though God has 'given' the land to Bnei Yisrael for their inheritance, this statement highlights how the true ownership remains His. In other words, God remains sovereign, while He allows Bnei Yisrael the right to work the land as though it was theirs. To emphasize this 'arrangement', once every fifty years the land must return to God. [Sort of like a 'fifty year lease'.]

To appreciate the wording of this pasuk, let's compare it to a similar statement made by Avraham Avinu when he approached Bnei Chet to buy a burial plot. Note the textual parallels:

> "And he spoke ot Bnei Chet saying, I am a **ger** ve-**toshav** among you, please allow me to buy an **achuzat kever** [burial plot] from you" (Breishit 23:3-4).

Even though Avraham was a resident in the land, he was not the sovereign power; rather Bnei Chet were. As the land was not yet his, Avraham must purchase from them an **achuza** (note again parallel with 'eretz achuzatchem' in 25:24), a 'hold' in the land, even though Bnei Chet control it.

Therefore, when Bnei Yisrael receive the Torah at Har Sinai, as they prepare to conquer 'Eretz Canaan', these laws of yovel will help them appreciate the dialectic nature of their forthcoming sovereignty over the land. In relation to the surrounding nations, once Bnei Yisrael achieve conquest - they will become the sovereign power. However, in relation to God, they must constantly remember that the land still belongs to God. He has granted to them only towards the purpose that they become His nation. The laws of yovel, which affect the very nature of property transactions during the entire fifty year shmitta and yovel cycle, will serve as a constant reminder that God has given them this land for a reason (and purpose).

This background can also help us understand what may be the underlying reason for the laws of 'teruma' - the small tithe that must be taken from the produce of land, and given to the kohen.

Just as the resident of any land must pay a property tax to the country's sovereign power, so too Bnei Yisrael must pay a 'tax' - i.e. **teruma** - to God, in recognition of His sovereignty over the land. Ultimately God gives this **teruma** to the kohanim (His servants), but note how the Torah emphasizes how there are two stages in this process. First, the teruma is given to God:

> "And when you eat from the bread of the land, you shall lift up a **teruma** for **God**..."(see Bamidbar 15:17-21).

Then (and only afterward) God awards this teruma to the kohanim:

> "And God told Aharon, behold I am giving you My **teruma** that I am keeping that Bnei Yisrael have set aside..." (see Bamidbar 18:8).
>
> [This also explains why teruma must be eaten 'be-tahara', for the kohen is eating food given to him by God. In contrast, 'ma'aser rishon' the ten percent tithe given by the Yisrael to the Levite has no kedusha - for it serves as a direct payment for the services that shevet Levi renders to the nation.]

RELATED LAWS

After explaining the reason for yovel, the Torah continues with several related laws. As we noted in our outline, these laws divide into two distinct sections, each containing examples of when one is forced to sell either:

1) His field, or
2) Himself.

Each set of examples focuses on the need to lend assistance for those in financial distress, and is concluded with a special summary pasuk.

Let's see how each pasuk is special.

ERETZ CANAAN IS NOT FOR SALE

After the laws relating to how we must help someone who was forced to sell his own field, the Torah reminds us:

> "I am the Lord your God who took you out of the land of Egypt to give you the **land of Canaan, lihiyot lachem le-Elokim** - to be your God" (see 25:38).

To appreciate this pasuk, we must return to our study of 'brit mila' (see Breishit 17:7-8), and the key phrase of that covenant: **lihiyot lachem le-Elokim** (see 17:7 & 17:8). Furthermore, it was specifically in that covenant that God promised **Eretz Canaan** to Avraham Avinu, and in that very same pasuk, the Torah refers to the land as an **achuza** (see 17:8).

Based on these parallels (compare them once again to Vayikra 25:38 & the word achuza in 25:25), we can conclude that this summary pasuk relates to brit mila. Let's explain why.

Recall how brit mila focused on the special close relationship between God and His nation, and how Eretz Canaan was to become the land where that relationship would achieve its highest potential. [The mitzva of brit mila serves as an 'ot' [a sign] to remind us of this covenant.]

As Eretz Canaan serves as a vehicle through which Bnei Yisrael can better develop this relationship, it is important that each person receives his 'fare share' of this land. Certainly, we would not want the ownership of the land to fall into the hands of a wealthy elite. The laws of yovel in chapter 25 help assure that every individual keeps his share of the land.

It also becomes everyone's responsibility to make sure that anyone who becomes less fortunate remains able to keep his portion in Eretz Canaan.

This explains the cases where one was forced to sell his

land, and its summary pasuk. Now we must proceed to the next section, which discusses cases where one was forced to sell himself.

WE ARE SERVANTS OF GOD, NOT MAN

Bamidbar 25:39-54 describes cases when someone becomes so poor that he must sell himself (not just his land) to his creditor; and how we are obligated to help him buy back his freedom. These psukim conclude with the following pasuk:

> "For Bnei Yisrael are servants to Me, they are My servants whom I have taken them out of the land of Egypt, I am the Lord your God" (25:55).

Now, it becomes obvious why this summary pasuk focuses on servitude, rather than land. Servitude to a fellow man would take away from man's ability to be a servant of God. Therefore, the summary pasuk of this section relates directly back to the events of Yetziat Mitzrayim. [From this perspective, this summary pasuk can be understood as a 'flashback' to 'brit bein ha-btarim', for in that covenant, God had already foreseen the events of Yetziat Mitzrayim (see Breishit 15:13-18).]

Even though man is free and enjoys the right to own land and determine his own destiny; he must remember that his freedom is a gift from God, and hence it should be utilized to serve Him. But even those who have achieved freedom share the responsibility to assist those in financial crisis, in order that they too can remain 'free' to serve God.

shabbat shalom
menachem

Parshat Behar: Mitzvot of Shev'it and Yovel

by Rabbi Eitan Mayer

1) Shevi'it (AKA "Shemita") means "seventh year": every seven years, a special set of agricultural laws applies in Eretz Yisrael. We are commanded to refrain from working the land in just about any way, including plowing, planting, and harvesting. The prohibition of harvesting does not mean we are supposed to either go hungry or scrape by just on the previous year's harvest; we are allowed to eat produce from the fields, but it must remain basically ownerless. Anyone who wants to take it is allowed to; we cannot harvest it and prevent access to it. In Devarim 15, we learn of the other dimension of this seventh year, the economic dimension: all debts between Jews are canceled by divine decree.

2) Yovel is the name given to every fiftieth year, the year after seven Shevi'it cycles have been completed. During Yovel, as during Shevi'it, most agricultural work is forbidden in Eretz Yisrael. In addition, all land in Eretz Yisrael which has been sold since the previous Yovel must be returned to its original owners, and all Jewish slaves must be released by their masters (even those slaves who have previously declined freedom at the conclusion of the normal six-year period of Jewish slavery).

A LOOK AT THE TEXTUAL LANDSCAPE:

On the surface, at least, there seems to be nothing particularly "priestly" about the mitzvot of Shemita and Yovel. If so, why are these mitzvot placed in VaYikra, AKA 'Torat Kohanim' ('Instructions for Priests')? What are these mitzvot doing in the same neighborhood as, for example:

1) The laws of korbanot (sacrifices), which occupy primarily perakim (chapters) 1-10.
2) The laws of tahara and tum'a (purity and impurity), which occupy primarily perakim 11-16.

Perhaps we must readjust our understanding of Sefer VaYikra's status as 'Torat Kohanim' to include themes other than those which directly address the kohanim and their duties. When we add up all the material in VaYikra which does not seem explicitly 'priestly' (i.e., no apparent connection to tahara, no apparent connection to korbanot, etc.), we come up with the following material, organized by perek (chapter):

18: arayot (sexual crimes such as incest, male homosexual sex, bestiality)
19: potpourri: interpersonal laws, ritual laws, agricultural laws, etc.
20: arayot etc.
23: mo'adim (holidays and holy days, e.g., Pesah, Shavuot, Succot, Rosh HaShana, Yom Kippur)
24: the mekallel (the blasphemer; "packaged with" laws of murder and damages).
25: Shevi'it and Yovel
26: berakha and kelala (blessings for those who keep the mitzvot and curses for those who don't).
27: laws of donating things to the Bet haMikdash.

What does all of this material have in common? Are there particular reasons why each of these sections deserves to appear in Sefer VaYikra, or is there one theme which unites them and justifies their inclusion in the sefer?

THE HOLINESS THEME:

The most obvious possibility for uniting the above sections is the theme of kedusha (usually translated 'holiness'), a theme we have discussed extensively in previous shiurim (mostly in Parashat Shemini). Kedusha's dominance as a motif in the latter third of Sefer VaYikra is explicit in the text itself:

19:2 -- Speak to the congregation of the Bnei Yisrael and say to them, "You shall be HOLY [kedoshim], for I am HOLY [kadosh], Y-HVH, your God."

20:7 -- You shall SANCTIFY yourselves [ve-hit-kadishtem] and be HOLY [kedoshim], for I am Y-HVH, your God.

20:8 -- You shall keep my laws and do them; I am Y-HVH, your SANCTIFIER [me-kadishkhem].

20:26 -- You shall be HOLY [kedoshim] to Me, for I, Y-HVH, am HOLY [kedosh]; I have separated you from the nations to be for Me.

21:6 -- They shall be HOLY [kedoshim] to their God, and not profane the name of their God, for the offerings of Y-HVH, the bread of their God, are they offering; they shall be HOLY [kodesh].

21:8 -- You shall SANCTIFY him [ve-kidashto], for he offers the bread of your God; he shall be HOLY [kadosh] to you, for I, Y-HVH, who SANCTIFIES you [me-kadishkhem], am HOLY [kadosh].

22:3 -- Say to them, for all of their generations, "Any of all of your descendants who approaches the SANCTIFIED things [kodashim] which Bnei Yisrael SANCTIFY [ya-kdishu] to Y-HVH, and his impurity is upon him, that soul will be cut off from before Me; I am Y-HVH."

22:9 -- They shall keep My watch and not bear sin for it and die when they profane it; I am Y-HVH, their SANCTIFIER [me-kadsham].

22:32 -- Do not profane My HOLY [kadshi] name; I shall be SANCTIFIED [ve-ni-kdashti] among Bnei Yisrael; I am Y-HVH, your SANCTIFIER [me-kadishkhem].

23:2 -- Speak to Bnei Yisrael and say to them, "The meeting-times of Y-HVH which you shall proclaim as proclamations of HOLINESS [kodesh], these are my meeting times."

There are many, many more examples, but perhaps these will suffice; the point is that many of the mitzvot in the latter third of Sefer VaYikra are connected with the idea of creating and protecting kedusha.

In summary, the theme of kedusha joins with the other two major themes of Sefer VaYikra to yield the following:

Theme I: Korbanot (perakim 1-10)
Theme II: Tahara and Tum'a (perakim 11-16)
Theme III: Kedusha (perakim 17-27)

As should be clear by now (close as we are to the end of Sefer VaYikra), while these three themes are centered in particular locations in the sefer, they are also freely interspersed among the material in all of the sections of Sefer VaYikra. In general, the korbanot material is centered in the first 10 perakim of the sefer, the purity material is centered in the middle of the sefer, and the kedusha material is centered in the end of the sefer. But these borders are highly permeable: for example, korbanot material appears in 17 (between the purity and kedusha sections), purity material appears in 20 (among the kedusha material), and kedusha material appears in 11 (among the purity material).

This brings us back to where we began: the mitzvot of Shemita and Yovel, found deep in the kedusha section. The Torah connects Shemita and Yovel with kedusha as well:

25:10 -- You shall SANCTIFY [ve-kidashtem] the year of the fiftieth year [this is not a typo] and proclaim freedom in the land for all its inhabitants; it shall be Yovel for you: each man shall return to his land portion, and to his family shall he return."

25:12 -- For it is Yovel; it shall be HOLY [kodesh] for you; from the fields shall you eat its produce.

[Although only Yovel (and not Shemita) is explicitly called "kadosh" by the Torah, I am lumping Shemita together with Yovel as kadosh because the Torah itself lumps the two together in perek 25, switching back and forth several times between the two topics without warning. This textual intertwining implies that these mitzvot are thematically intertwined as well. In addition, they are halakhically interdependent as well: the cancellation of debts on Shevi'it, for example, is biblically mandated only during periods in which Yovel as well is kept; see Rambam, Shemita ve-Yovel 9:2. See also 10:9, which, depending on the version of the text, may hinge the entire biblical status of agricultural Shevi'it on the concurrent performance of Yovel.]

MY PET THEORY ABOUT KEDUSHA (AGAIN):

What is 'holy' about Yovel and Shemita? Taking a certain view of kedusha would make this question irrelevant, or at least unanswerable: if we understand kedusha as some sort of mystical/metaphysical/spiritual quality of ethereal, mysterious,

imperceptible nature, not apprehensible by either the senses or the intellect but only by the soul (perhaps), then we can close the books right here. What could we possibly have to say about something we cannot perceive or understand? If the Torah commands us to be "holy" and then tells us that Yovel and Shemita generate "holiness," then we should of course observe Yovel and Shemita so that we can become "holy."

But why would the Torah bother to tell us about "holiness" if we could not really understand it? If the "holiness" characterizations are in the Torah as an inducement to us to do the mitzvot ("Do the mitzvot so you will become holy"), it follows that we must be able to develop a good understanding of what kedusha is -- otherwise, what is the inducement? Why would the Torah bother repeating the holiness theme so many times (see examples above) if we could never really understand holiness anyway?

As we have developed in detail in our discussion of Parashat Shemini and other parshiot in Sefer VaYikra, one other possibility for understanding kedusha (besides the "mystical essence" perspective) is that it is not really the point! Kedusha is not our *goal,* it is one of our ways of getting to our real goals. To understand this idea, it might be best to discard the word "holiness" as a translation for "kedusha," and replace it with the word "dedication." The word "dedication" is a nice fit because it means "set aside for specific purposes" and carries the connotation of "being set aside for a *higher* purpose."

To illustrate how this "kedusha" is not the goal but is one of our ways of getting to our goals: imagine you are the executive of a company. Your company has a contract to complete a challenging project for an important client within a certain amount of time. Now, you certainly expect "dedication" from your employees, but "dedication" itself is not your goal -- finishing the challenging project in time is your goal; if your workers are "dedicated," you will get there on time! [Of course, the use of the word "dedication" in a non-religious context is not quite the same as "kedusha," which carries that all-important connotation of "higher purpose."]

The Torah expects "dedication" (read "kedusha") of us in two ways:

1) The Torah commands us to *be* "kedoshim": we are to be the "am kadosh" (dedicated nation); we are commanded "kedoshim tihyu" ("You shall be dedicated"). According to this understanding of kedusha, we are not commanded to be "holy," a command we wouldn't really understand; we are instead commanded to be "dedicated." Of course, this "dedication" is not itself the goal; the *object* of the dedication -- the mitzvot -- are the goals. Kedusha is a way of getting there: if we are "kedoshim," we are "dedicated" to the mitzvot.

2) The Torah commands us to dedicate ("me-kadesh") things other than ourselves: times, places, objects, and people, for example. Shabbat and the moa'dim are "dedicated" (kadosh) times; the Mishkan and Bet HaMikdash are "dedicated" (kadosh) spaces; the korbanot and the utensils of the Mishkan are "dedicated" (kadosh) objects; the Kohanim and others are specially "dedicated" (kadosh) people. The process of dedicating these things is not a secret ritual, it is apparent from the meaning of the word "dedicate": these things are to be set apart and restricted for higher purposes.

KEDUSHA AND RESTRICTION:

This explains why kedusha is so often connected in the Torah with restrictions:

1) The kedusha of time always triggers a prohibition to do work ("mikra'ei kodesh" is not just followed by, but is explained by, "kol melakha/melekhet-avoda lo ta'asu"), since dedicated time is time that cannot be used for everyday purposes;

2) The kedusha of space is always connected with restriction of access to that space (who can ascend Har Sinai, who can enter the Mishkan and the Kodesh ha-Kodashim) because, by definition, dedicated space is restricted to a particular use;

3) The kedusha of objects is always connected to their restricted use (e.g., objects dedicated to the estate of the Mishkan--"hekdesh"--may not be used for personal benefit; korbanot may be eaten only by certain people for certain amounts of time and in certain places) because they are dedicated to a higher purpose;

4) The kedusha of people is always connected to restrictions about what they may have access to and who may have access to them (e.g., a Kohen is prohibited from contacting a corpse, marrying women with certain personal statuses; the Kohen Gadol, who is even more dedicated (kadosh), may not even contact the corpses of immediate family members and may not marry even a widow) because they are dedicated to higher purposes.

The connection between restrictions and kedusha is quite direct:

Kedusha = Dedication --> Restricted Access.

If I have a telephone line "dedicated" to my fax machine or my computer modem or whatever, that line is *by definition* restricted from other uses. Kedusha, by definition, means restriction.

HILLUL:

This also explains what we mean by "hillul," usually translated as "profanation," the direct opposite of kedusha. Examples of "hillul" in the Torah:

1) Eating a korban shelamim on the third day after its sacrifice is called a "hillul" (19:8). Because it is "dedicated" (kadosh) as an offering to Hashem, it must be treated specially, differently than non-dedicated meat: the shelamim must be eaten in the first two days after sacrifice. By definition, one who violates this restriction undoes ("profanes") the kedusha, because the entire essence of the kedusha is the restriction. It is like using my "dedicated fax line" for a voice conversation: doing this reverses the dedication of the phone line, by definition, because here I am using what used to be the fax-only line for a voice call!

2) Causing one's daughter to become a prostitute is called a "hillul" by the Torah (19:29) because by definition, a woman who is available to *everyone* is dedicated (kadosh) to *no one*! The opposite of this hillul is "kiddushin," the word we use, by no coincidence, for marriage, which *dedicates* a woman to her husband to the exclusion of all other men.

I apologize to all those who are tired of hearing me repeat this idea of kedusha through the course of Sefer VaYikra, but it seems to me an important point to stress. It makes Sefer VaYikra no longer the locus of the obscure imperative to become "holy," and turns it into the locus of the powerful and concrete demand for *dedication!* We are to dedicate ourselves entirely to serving Hashem; we are commanded to dedicate times, places, objects, and people to special religious purposes, restricting them from normal access so that important goals can be accomplished in the fenced-off space created by the restrictions. The fence of Shabbat keeps work out so that we can contemplate Hashem's creation of the world; the fence of incest prohibitions (arayot) restricts sex between relatives so that the family may develop in the space thereby created; the fence of korbanot restrictions protects the korbanot (AKA kodashim) from being used in ways which would compromise their quality as offerings to Hashem.

THE KEDUSHA OF YOVEL AND SHEMITA:

To get back to our parasha, what is the theme of the kedusha of Yovel and Shemita? What values are protected by or embodied in these mitzvot? According to the Rambam, the answer is quite obvious:

MOREH NEVUKHIM (GUIDE OF THE PERPLEXED) 3:39 --

"The mitzvot included in the fourth group are those encompassed by the Book of Zera'im ("Seeds," one of the 14 books of the Rambam's halakhic code, Mishneh Torah) . . . all of these mitzvot, if you think about them one by one, you will find that their benefit is obvious: to be merciful to the poor and disadvantaged and to strengthen the poor in various ways, and to avoid causing anguish to people who are in difficult situations . . . . Among the mitzvot counted among the Laws of Shemita and Yovel (which is in the Book of Zera'im): some include mercy and generosity to all people, as it says, "And the poor of your nation shall eat it, and the rest shall the beast of the field eat," as well as that the produce of the ground should increase and strengthen through its fallowness; some [other mitzvot in this category] show mercy to slaves and poor people, i.e., the cancellation of debts and the freeing of slaves; some take care that people will have a consistent source of financial support, so that the entire land is protected against permanent sale . . . a person's property remains always for him and his heirs, and he eats his own produce and no one else's."

In other words, Shemita and Yovel bring us:

1) Generosity toward the poor (free food in the fields).
2) Improvement of the land (letting it lie fallow).
3) Mercy toward the poor (canceling debts).

4) Mercy toward slaves (freeing them).
5) Economic security for all (return of land to original owners).
6) Prevention of economic domination over others (return of lands).

These "achievements" fall into the class of human-focused concerns: taking care of the powerless (poor, slaves, etc.) and constructing a fair and stable economy (land returnd to owners, land must lie fallow periodically). This is by no means a disparagement; at the core of these concerns is the desire for social justice, mercy, stability and equality, certainly a roster of important values.

Yet, something important seems to be missing from the Rambam's list, a major theme which is nearly explicit in the Torah itself: the *theological* dimension of Yovel and Shemita:

VAYIKRA 25:

". . . **When you come to the land I am giving to you, the land shall rest a Sabbath **TO Y-HVH**** . . . . in the seventh year shall be a Sabbath for the land, a Sabbath **TO Y-HVH** . . . . If you shall say, "What will we eat in the seventh year, since we cannot sow or gather our produce?" I shall command My blessing upon you in the sixth year; it will produce enough for all three years . . . . The land shall never be sold permanently, for ALL THE LAND IS MINE; for you are 'immigrants' and temporary dwellers with Me . . . . If your brother's hand falters [financially], and he is sold to you [as a slave] . . . until the year of the Yovel shall he work with you. He shall then go out from you, he and his sons with him, and return to his family and to the land of his fathers. For THEY ARE MY SLAVES, whom I took out of the land of Egypt; they shall not be sold as [permanent] slaves.

On the one hand, the Sabbath is a Sabbath for the land, which 'rests,' and for the poor and the animals, which eat freely from all fields. These aspects are mentioned by the Rambam. On the other hand, it is also "a Sabbath to Y-HVH," as the Torah tells us twice. What does Hashem want from this Shabbat?

In addition, the absolute prohibition to work the fields during this year does not quite flow from a desire to make sure the fields have a year to replenish themselves so that they can remain fertile. If field-improvement were the true motivation for the agricultural-work prohibition, it would have been enough to command that we simply let some of our fields lie fallow each year; there would be no need to go so far as to cancel all agriculture nationwide for a year. Furthermore, if the motivation is to allow the fields to rest, then the Torah should prohibit plowing and planting, not harvesting. After all, the fields would not be depleted by our harvesting whatever happens to grow in them--yet the Torah forbids also harvesting.

Perhaps the claim could be made that the goal of the Torah is to provide sustenance for the poor and the animals, and that harvesting by landowners would deprive them of this food. But this claim seems weak indeed, for if the point is to feed the poor and the animals, why does this mitzvah arrive only once in seven years? Are the poor and the animals supposed to starve in the interim? Additionally, there is already an elaborate structure of mitzvot in place also during non-Shemita years to provide for the needs of the poor: ma'aser ani (tithes for the poor), leket (the requirement to leave behind for the poor the stray pieces of the harvest which the harvesters drop accidentally), shikheha (a similar mitzvah), pe'ah (the requirement to leave the corner of a field for the poor to harvest), and other mitzvot. It seems, therefore, that a different value is being served by the requirement to halt agriculture for this year.

Reading further in the Torah, it appears true that there is an interpersonal dimension to the requirement to return all land to its original owners at Yovel, but the Torah's justification for this mitzvah points clearly at Hashem, not at man: **"The land shall never be sold permanently, for ALL THE LAND IS MINE; for you are 'immigrants' and temporary dwellers with Me."**

Reading further, it is again true that there is an interpersonal dimension to releasing all Jewish slaves at Yovel, but again, the Torah's justification points to Hashem, not only to mercy and social justice: "For THEY ARE MY SLAVES, whom I took out of the land of Egypt; they shall not be sold as [permanent] slaves."

What is the dimension of Shemita and Yovel which focuses on Hashem? Perhaps it is obvious already, but the Sefer Ha-Hinnukh brings it out explicitly:

SEFER HA-HINNUKH, MITZVAH 84:
"Among the roots of this mitzvah: to fix in our hearts and vividly paint in our minds the concept of the creation of the world,

for in six days did Hashem create the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh, when He created nothing, he proclaimed rest for Himself . . . Therefore He, blessed is He, commanded that we also declare ownerless (le-hafkir) all that the fields produce in this year, besides the prohibition of agricultural work: in order than man should remember that the land, which produces fruits for him every single year, does not do so on the basis of its own strength and qualities, but instead that it has a Master over it and over its [human] owners, and when He desires, He commands that it [the produce] be declared ownerless . . . .

"One other result [which this mitzvah] produces in a person is that the person strengthens his trust in Hashem, for anyone who finds in his heart the ability to freely give to the world and declare ownerless all the produce of his lands and his fathers' inheritance for an entire year, and he and his family are accustomed to doing so all their lives--such a person will never develop the trait of miserliness or the trait of lack of trust in Hashem."

Shemita and Yovel remind us that the goal of life is not to build empires. Every few years, the possessions about which we feel so 'possessive' become public property, for all practical purposes. Imagine you run a clothing store. Business is booming, hems are down, prices are up, you see big growth ahead and branch out into another few stores. You're up to two dozen branches when suddenly the rules change: instead of selecting clothing they want and can afford and then paying for it, your customers start to just walk out with what they want without paying a dime. You appeal to the authorities, but they explain to you that for the next little while, this is the way it is supposed to be. If so, you wonder, what happens to your empire? More fundamentally, if this environment is unfriendly to pure capitalism, then what is it that you are supposed to be pursuing? Clearly, you conclude, not empire-building. **Your possessions do not belong to you in any absolute sense; they belong to this Higher Authority, which periodically overrides your 'temporary possession' status to remind you just Who is the real Owner.**

Perhaps more fundamentally, as the Hinnukh points out, Shemita and Yovel point us away from the world and back to Hashem. Spending all our days out in the fields (boardroom/ office/ operating room/ trading floor/ bank/ classroom/ laboratory) planting (investing/ lending at interest/ strategizing/ leveraging/ writing computer code) and sowing (selling high/ closing the deal/ healing the patient/ raiding the corporation/ selling the product), we start to believe that the source of our success is the things we can see--our own hard work and the system in which we do our hard work. Instead of bitahon, trust in Hashem, we trust ourselves and the arena in which we exercise our skills. Sustenance no longer comes from Providence, but instead from the futures market, from a technology startup, from our boss, from the booming real estate market. The 'real world' becomes for us the one in which we spend most of our time and on which we focus most of our energies.

Shemita and Yovel crack this facade wide open. No one, the Hinnukh notes, can maintain an arrogant self-reliance if he knows that every few years his livelihood disappears and he depends completely on the bounty of Hashem to see him through to the time when Hashem allows the everyday to rush back in. Even when we return to this 'natural' world, the one in which we create for ourselves the illusion that we are in control and that we are our own Providers, we remember the experience of Shemita and Yovel.

May we merit to see the restoration of Yovel (possible only with the gathering of the Jews to Eretz Yisrael) and to see the more complete implementation of the mitzvah of Shemita. It is our job to find ways in our own lives to internalize the lessons behind these mitzvot, even if we are not farmers or do not live in Eretz Yisrael. May we grow in our trust in Hashem and remain dedicated to pursuing a life of empire-building in serving Him.

PARASHAT BE-HUKKOTAI: "LISTEN UP . . . OR ELSE":

Parashat Be-Hukkotai presents the first of the two major 'tokhaha' ("warning") sections in the Torah: sections in which we are told in detail exactly what will happen to us if we abandon the mitzvot. The other tokhaha section is much later on, at the end of Sefer Devarim (Deuteronomy), in Parashat Ki Tavo. The phenomenon of a tokhaha section signals a great opportunity to think about many key issues; for example:

1) Are reward and punishment for our deeds delivered to us here in this life, as the tokhaha seems to imply, or at some later stage beyond the life of this world (or at both points)? [Since this issue is really a philosophical one, we will stick to more concretely textual concerns. Abravanel discusses this issue at length, presenting 7, count 'em, 7 different perspectives.]

2) If Hashem is a truly merciful God, can it be that He will really punish us in the horrible ways depicted in the tokhaha? If

so, how does that impact our understanding of Hashem's nature? [Another issue of philosophy; not our focus in a parasha shiur.]

3) Do these recipes for disaster remain in reserve in Hashem's arsenal, or do they echo in history in events that we have actually experienced as a nation? What do they say about our future? [Looks promising as a topic, but may get us sidetracked in trying to identify biblical predictions with historical events; also, we may run into serious trouble if we try to fit the Sho'a into this framework.]

4) What is the function of tokhaha, and what does the tokhaha have to say? Does the Torah expect that we will be more obedient if it threatens us with what will happen if we don't behave, or is there some other purpose to the tokhaha?

This last set of questions is the one with which we will deal this week. What is the Torah saying to us besides "Listen to Me, or else . . ."?

A LOOK AT THE BOOKENDS:

At the beginning of Parashat Be-Har, the Torah says:

25:1 -- Y-HVH spoke to Moshe in Mount Sinai, saying . . . .

This introduction is followed by the mitzvot we discussed: Shemita and Yovel, which require that:

1) We perform no agricultural work in Eretz Yisrael in the last year of every seven years, that we consider all produce which grows (by itself) that year ownerless and allow the poor and the animals to take it;

2) We cancel all loans between Jews in this seventh year;

3) We treat the last year of every fifty years just like we treat a seventh year, abstaining from agricultural work etc.;

4) We free all Jewish slaves in this fiftieth year;

5) We return to the original owners all land which has been sold in the past 49 years.

As discussed, these mitzvot shatter the illusion we might otherwise begin to believe that the 'reality' of earning our bread is the *real* reality and that worshipping Hashem is a nice addendum but is not part of the hard-nosed real world. There is perhaps nothing more hard-nosed and 'real' than Shemita and Yovel. Imagine if this were to happen next week -- the government announces that all work is to stop for the next year, all food which grows is deemed ownerless, all debts are canceled, all land returns to the people who owned it half a century ago. Sound like a recipe for economic chaos and disaster? Exactly! By mandating this behavior, the Torah punctures our illusion of reality and shoves it aside before a more 'real' reality: we are forced to recognize that we own what we do only by the generosity of Hashem and that the economy is completely instrumental; it is not at all important in any ultimate sense, it is there only to facilitate our service of Hashem.

This lesson is so important that it is followed by a series of warnings about what will happen if we do not keep the mitzvot of Shemita and Yovel: the tokhaha. The fact that the tokhaha is aimed primarily at reinforcing our observance of Shemita and Yovel is supported by several features of the text. Most basically, the Torah's placing the tokhaha immediately after the mitzvot of Shemita and Yovel intimates that the warnings apply most directly to these mitzvot.

The connection between Shemita/Yovel and the tokhaha is strengthened further by the 'bookends' with which the Torah surrounds the section on Shemita and Yovel and the tokhaha. We noted above that the Torah begins Parashat Be-Har with the news that what we are about to learn was delivered by Hashem to Moshe at Sinai. Then come the mitzvot of Shemita and Yovel. Then comes the tokhaha (in the beginning of Be-Hukkotai), and just after the tokhaha, the Torah places another bookend, reporting that what we have just read was what Hashem communicated to Moshe at Sinai. (Another such bookend appears at the end of Parashat Be-Hukkotai, sealing Sefer VaYikra.) What the Torah may be hinting again by placing bookends before Shemita/Yovel and after the tokhaha is that these warnings are aimed at neglect of these mitzvot in particular.

Further and more explicit evidence of the connection between the tokhaha and Shemita/Yovel can be found in the text of the tokhaha itself. As the tokhaha begins, it sounds like a general warning about neglecting any of the mitzvot: (26:14-15) "If you do not listen to Me, and do not do all of these mitzvot; if you despise My laws, and if your souls revile My statutes, by not doing all of My mitzvot, thereby abrogating My covenant . . . ." However, as we move toward the end of the tokhaha, it seems clearer that the phrase "all of these mitzvot" refers not to the mitzvot as a whole, but to "these mitzvot" which have just been discussed: Shemita and Yovel. After the Torah describes how the rebellious nation would be driven out of its land:

"*Then* the land will enjoy its Sabbaths [=Shemita years], all the days of its abandonment, with your being in the land of your enemies; *then* the land will rest, and enjoy its Sabbaths! All the days of its abandonment, it shall rest the rests it did not rest during your Sabbaths [i.e., during the years that were supposed to have been Shemita years], when you lived upon it!" (26:34-35).

"The land shall be abandoned of them, and it shall enjoy its Sabbaths in its abandonment from them, and they [the nation] shall expiate for their sin, since they despised My statutes and their souls reviled My laws" (26:43).

We commit sins, unnamed at the beginning of the tokhaha, but by the end it seems apparent that the abandonment of the land and the consequent cessation of its cultivation through agriculture atones for the sins. The best conclusion: the sins referred to by the tokhaha are the neglect of Shemita and Yovel. Our not ceasing to work the land during Shemita requires our exile from the land so that it can rest on the Sabbaths we have denied it; our not canceling loans during Shemita requires that we become impoverished and powerless; our not returning land to its owners during Yovel requires that we be denied ownership over even our own land; our not freeing Jewish slaves during Yovel requires that we ourselves be taken captive and sold as slaves by those whom Hashem sends to conquer us. Mida ke-neged mida, measure for measure.

MEETING THE CHALLENGE:

The Torah knows how difficult it is to keep Shemita and Yovel. It is certainly a tall order to take a forced sabbatical, to resist the urge to try to make the maximum profit by planting during this year, and to trust that Hashem will provide enough food to compensate for this year's lack of harvest. It is a tremendous challenge to forgive all loans to Jews every seven years. It is certainly no simple matter to release one's hold on one's real estate empire and return the parcels of land to their owners, and in a society which accepts slavery, it is almost 'unrealistic' to expect that slaveowners will release their Jewish slaves in response to a Divine command. But this is what Shemita and Yovel demand.

The Torah prepares us for the challenge of Shemita and Yovel in various ways. One way is the tokhaha, a warning of the dire consequences of neglect: disease, destruction, disaster, death. Other indications that the Torah expects these mitzvot to run into resistance, and other ways in which the Torah tries to strengthen us, are amply provided by the text itself. First, the Torah anticipates our fear that if we do not plant in the seventh year, we will starve:

(25:20-21) If you shall say, "What shall we eat in the seventh year? After all, we shall not be planting or gathering our produce!" I shall command My blessing for you in the sixth year, and it will provide produce for three years.

Next, the Torah anticipates that canceling all loans to Jews will prove a very unpopular mitzvah, and duly warns and encourages us:

(Devarim 15:7-10) If there shall be among you a pauper, from among your brothers, in one of your gates, in your land, which Y-HVH your God is giving to you--do not harden your heart and do not close your hand to your poor brother; instead, completely open your hand to him and lend him enough to provide whatever he lacks. Beware lest there be an evil thought in your heart, saying, "The seventh year, the year of Shemita [literally, 'cancellation'] is approaching," and you shall look ungenerously upon your poor brother, and you shall not give to him, and he shall call out against you to Y-HVH, and you will have sinned. You shall surely give to him, and let your heart not be bitter when you when you give him, for because of this thing Y-HVH, your God, shall bless you in all of your works and in all of your efforts.

HINTS FROM THE RAMBAM:

The Rambam's Hilkhot Shemita ve-Yovel (Laws of Shemita and Yovel) provides subtle but crucial confirmation that

Shemita and Yovel are mitzvot that we accepted as a nation somewhat reluctantly. Instead of warnings and exhortations, these indications are assumptions which are built into the halakhic system:

Chapter 1, Law 12 -- One who plants during the seventh year, whether purposely or accidentally [i.e., with or without the awareness that it is the seventh year and that planting is forbidden], must uproot what he has planted, for *the* *Jews* *are* *suspected* *by* *[halakha]* *of* *violating* *the* *laws* *of* *the* *seventh* *year,* [!!!] and if we were to permit leaving the plant in the ground if it had been planted accidentally, those who had planted purposely would just claim to have planted accidentally.

Chapter 4, Law 2 -- All plants which grow wild during this year are rabbinically prohibited to be eaten. Why did they [the rabbis] decree that they be forbidden? Because of the sinners: so that one should not go and secretly plant grain and beans and garden vegetables in his field, and then when they sprout he would eat them and claim that they grew wild; therefore they forbade all wild plants which sprout during the seventh year.

[See also 4:27, 8:18]

Chapter 9, Law 16 -- When Hillel the Elder saw that the people were refusing to lend money to each other and were transgressing the verse written in the Torah, "Beware lest there be an evil thought in your heart . . .", he established for them the "pruzbul," [a special contract] which would prevent the cancellation of their debts to each other . . . .

Clearly, Shemita and Yovel are difficult mitzvot, and they require the Torah's encouragement.

TWO SIDES OF A COIN:

We have seen that the tokhaha appears closely connected to the mitzvot of Shemita and Yovel (or, more precisely, the neglect of these mitzvot) and that the Torah and halakha take pains to encourage observance of these mitzvot and prevent abuses of the halakha. But now that we have zeroed in these mitzvot as the focus of the tokhaha, we return to the question with which we began: what is the purpose of the tokhaha? Does the Torah expect us to be frightened by these threats into properly keeping Shemita and Yovel? Perhaps threats work in some cultures (or in all cultures in some centuries), but from our perspective in the 20th (almost 21st) century, and considering that most of us are products of Western culture, threats don't usually have much effect. (Take a look around and try to estimate what percentage of the Jewish people remain faithful to the mitzvot of the Torah despite the many warnings and exhortations the Torah offers.) Since the Torah is an eternal and divinely authored document, we must be able to find significance in it in all generations and in all cultures. So what does message does the tokhaha communicate to us?

Surprisingly, the tokhaha may teach us the same lesson as Shemita and Yovel themselves attempt to teach us.

In the 'normal' course of life, we go about our business, doing our best to achieve some level of material comfort. The world either rewards our efforts or doesn't, but either way, we are eternally and tragically prone to two enormous errors: 1) we begin to believe that making money and achieving domination over material and people are ultimate goals in their own right, and 2) we begin to believe that credit for our success or failure (but particularly our success) goes entirely to us. Shemita and Yovel come to prevent or correct these errors: completely interrupting the economy every few years has a nasty way of sucking all of the wind out of the pursuit of wealth and reminding us that in any event we are not in control of the system.

But there is another option. Shemita and Yovel are only one way of helping us maintain our awareness of these truths and therefore forcing us to look outside wealth and power to find the goals of our lives. Although Shemita and Yovel are obligatory, in some sense, they are a 'voluntary' way of reminding ourselves of where our ultimate attention should be directed. If we choose to reject Shemita and Yovel and insist that the economy (and our pursuit of wealth and power) will march on no matter what, Hashem has other options for reminding us of these truths. We can either choose to puncture the economic facade every seven years of our own volition, shattering our own mounting illusions and taming our growing greed, or Hashem will do the puncturing for us. Either way, we will remain inescapably aware of what Hashem wants us to know, but we get to choose whether to take the 'bitter pill' ourselves, or have our figurative national limbs amputated by plague, invasion, destruction, exile, and oppression.

That this is one of the deeper meanings of the tokhaha is hinted by the Torah and by the Rambam's interpretation of it. The tokhaha uses the word "keri" several times to describe the unacceptable behavior of the Jews in rejecting Shemita

and Yovel; Hashem promises powerful retribution. But, amazingly, we still have the potential to miss the point. Apparently, *nothing* can guarantee that someone who refuses to see Hashem's control of the world will suddenly open his eyes. Shemita and Yovel are good options, but we can choose to ignore them. Destruction and punishment are more highly aggressive options, but they too can fail at their task if we do not see our misfortune as Hashem's "plan B" for getting us to look away from the material world and ourselves and toward Him and His goals for us:

Rambam, Laws of Fast Days, Chapter 1:

Law 1 -- It is a positive biblical command to cry out and to blow with trumpets over every crisis which comes upon the community .
. . .

Law 2 -- This practice is among the paths of repentance, for when a crisis comes and they cry out over it and blow the trumpets, all will know that it is because of their evil deeds that evil has befallen them . . . and this will cause them to [try to] remove the crisis from upon them.

Law 3 -- But if they do not cry out and blow, and instead say, "This disaster which has occurred to us is just the way of the world," "This crisis simply happened by coincidence," this is the way of callousness, and causes them to maintain their evil ways, and then the crisis will grow into further crises, as it says in the Torah [in the tokhaha in our parasha], "You have behaved with Me as if all is 'keri' [happenstance], so I shall behave with you with wrathful keri [happenstance]," meaning, "If I bring upon you a crisis to make you repent, if you then say that it is a meaningless coincidence, I will add fury to that occurrence [and punish you further]."

As the tokhaha begins, Hashem warns that He will punish us for ignoring Shemita and Yovel; according to the interpretation we have been developing, the point is not so much to punish us as to provide a less friendly way of achieving what Shemita and Yovel were supposed to achieve (26:14-17). Our planting will yield nothing (as our voluntary non-planting during Shemita should have done) and our security will be destroyed by diseases which blind and confuse us. Our sense of control and mastery will be shattered by defeat at the hands of our enemies. If we still do not respond, we are punished further (18-20): Hashem will "smash the pride of your power"; He will turn the sky and ground into unyielding metal, and our attempts to violate Shemita will amount to nothing. At this point the Torah introduces the word 'keri': "If you behave with Me with keri" (21), if you ascribe these disasters simply to global warming or acid rain or ozone depletion or any other cause unconnected with the theological lesson of Shemita and Yovel, "I will add to your suffering seven times for your sin." (Not that environmental damage should be ignored.) Because we refused to make our food available to the animal as commanded during Shemita, the animals will help make us suffer (22) and topple the sense of domination and order we have imposed on the world. Hashem sarcastically asserts that He will respond to our claim of 'keri' with more of that 'keri'; if we believe it is all just part of the natural process, then we will just keep getting more of that 'natural process' until it dawns on us to wonder whether something is amiss. Eventually, we are to be exiled, and then "the land shall enjoy its Sabbaths." Again, Hashem speaks with bitter sarcasm: if we refuse to accept Shemita and Yovel, and if we reject our suffering's meaning, then finally at least the unthinking *land* will understand and will celebrate Shemita when there is no one left to pick up a shovel and violate the Sabbath of the land.

In this light, the blessings we find just before the tokhaha, which are promised to us if we keep Shemita and Yovel, also take on new meaning. These blessings are not simply rewards for good behavior and obedience, they are in fact only possible if we keep Shemita and Yovel. We can be allowed to enjoy material success, military victory, personal fertility, and the other blessings mentioned there only if we keep Shemita and Yovel, because otherwise these blessings begin to compete with Hashem for our attention. Only if we 'voluntarily' impose Shemita and Yovel on ourselves and remind ourselves of the ultimate goals to which we are to dedicate ourselves can we be trusted to properly interpret the meaning of our success.

The end of the tokhaha promises that no matter how bad things get, Hashem will never abandon us completely. But this is comforting only now that we have seen the tokhaha in empirical historical Technicolor. In our century, now that Hashem has shown us a smile of gracious generosity, may we think creatively and seriously to find personal ways to remind ourselves of our ultimate goals and to prevent ourselves from being blinded by greed and egotism.

Shabbat Shalom

Parshas Behar: Sh'Mittah And Sinai

By Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

I. WHAT DOES SH'MITTAH HAVE TO DO WITH SINAI?

"And God spoke to Mosheh B'har Sinai, saying:" Our Parashah opens with this familiar phrase, set off with a twist. Instead of the usual "And God spoke to Mosheh, saying:", we are told that the following series of commands were given B'har Sinai – (presumably) "on top of Mount Sinai." This phrasing is odd, as follows: We hold one of two positions regarding the giving of Mitzvot. Either Mosheh received the entire corpus of Law when he was on top of the Mountain, or else he received the first section of the Law on top of Sinai, received more Mitzvot inside the Mishkan – and still more in the plains of Mo'av before his death. If we hold that all of the Mitzvot were given on Sinai, then why does the Torah underscore that these particular Mitzvot (those presented in Chapters 25 and 27 of Vayyikra) were spoken atop the mountain? Conversely, if we hold that, subsequent to the construction of the Mishkan, all Mitzvot were given (beginning with the first chapter of Vayyikra) in the Mishkan – then why is this "earlier" section written later?

II. RASHI'S ANSWER

Rashi – and many other Rishonim – is sensitive to this anomaly. The first comment of Rashi on our Parashah (citing the Torah Kohanim) is:

"What is the association between Sh'mittah (the Sabbatical year – i.e. the first Mitzvah in our Parasha) and Sinai? After all, weren't all Mitzvot given at Sinai? Rather, to teach you that just as all of the rules and details of Sh'mittah were given at Sinai, so were all of the rules and details of all Mitzvot given at Sinai."

Rashi's answer (see also S'forno, Ramban and Ibn Ezra for different responses to this question) leaves us only a bit more satisfied. We now understand that Sh'mittah is a model for all the Mitzvot – but why Sh'mittah? Why not idolatry, Shabbat or some other area of law?

Before suggesting another answer, I'd like to pose several other questions on our Parashah:

In v. 2, we are told that when we come to the Land, it shall rest (every seven years). This "rest" is called a "Shabbat for God". How can land, which is inanimate, experience a Shabbat? All of our Shabbat-associations until this point have been oriented towards people (and, perhaps animals – we are not allowed to make them work on Shabbat). Why does the Torah refer to the "year of lying fallow" as a Shabbat?

Subsequent to the laws of Sh'mittah, the Torah commands us to count seven series of Shabbat-years, totaling forty-nine years. The fiftieth year will be called a Yovel (Jubilee), which will involve the blasting of a Shofar and the freeing of all indentured servants and land. Why is this year called a Yovel and why is the blasting of the Shofar the "catalyst" for this freedom?

Further on in the Parashah, the Torah delineates a series of Mitzvot affecting social welfare – beginning with support for fellows who are suffering, helping them redeem their land etc. Why are these Mitzvot in our Parashah – shouldn't they be in Parashat Mishpatim (Sh'mot 21-23) with the rest of civil and criminal laws?
Finally, our Parashah ends with a verse which shows up elsewhere in Torah (Vayyikra 19:30): "Observe My Shabbatot and revere My Sanctuary, I am YHVH". What is the meaning behind this twofold command?

III. "B'HAR" – "ON" OR "AT" THE MOUNTAIN?

To address our first concern, we have to investigate the meaning of the phrase "B'har Sinai". Although many translations render it "on top of Mount Sinai", this is not the only proper reading. In several other places in the Torah (e.g. Bamidbar 28:6, D'varim 1:6), this phrase can only be translated "at Mount Sinai". I'd like to suggest a similar read here: "God spoke to Mosheh AT Mount Sinai, saying:" The difference between the two is significant, as follows:

Although the Mishkan was dedicated at the end of Sefer Sh'mot, and we were told that the Cloud would rest on it "during all of our travels", that doesn't mean that those travels began immediately. The entire book of Vayyikra, which was given by

God in the Mishkan (see Vayyikra 1:1), was also given “At Mount Sinai”! In other words, since the B’nei Yisra’el had constructed the Mishkan at the foot of the mountain – and that’s where they remained throughout the book of Vayyikra (and ten chapters into Bamidbar), all of these Mitzvot were simultaneously given Me’Ohel Mo’ed (from the Mishkan) and B’har Sinai.

Once we establish that “b’Har Sinai” does not exclude me’Ohel Mo’ed, we have to ask why the Torah chose to highlight the “Mishkan” component during the first part of Vayyikra – and to highlight the “Sinaitic” component in our section.

We will be able to understand this once we reconsider the first Mitzvot in our Parashah. The Torah teaches us that the Land of Israel needs a Shabbat. We asked why this year is called “Shabbat:. When we remember that Shabbat was woven into the creation of the world, we can easily understand the message. Just as the weekly Shabbat is not associated with an external event, but is part of the fabric of creation (see B’resheet 2:1-3), so is Shabbat a part of the nature of the Land. In other words, the Land of Israel is (so to speak) alive – and must be treated with that sensitivity.

IV. TWO KINDS OF SANCTITY

When we compare the sanctity of the Ohel Mo’ed with that of Sinai, we discover that whereas the Mishkan was holy because of God’s Presence which rested there as a result of B’nei Yisra’el’s work (donation, construction and dedication), Sinai was already holy before we got there (Sh’mot 3:1). This was the first “place” that they ever encountered which had inherent holiness!

When the Torah highlights that these Mitzvot were given at Mount Sinai, it is reminding us that there are two types of holiness which we will encounter in the Land – “constructed” holiness, which we imbue by conquering and settling Eretz Yisra’el – and “inherent” holiness, which has been there from time immemorial. This dimension of holiness is the reason why the land itself needs a Shabbat. That is why the Parashah is captioned as being said “b’Har Sinai”.

Once we see the association between Sinai and the Land, it is easier to understand the role of the Shofar blast in the Yovel – and the reason the year is called a Yovel. When we first stood at Sinai, God revealed His Law to us. This Revelation was accompanied with the blast of a Shofar – which the Torah calls a Yovel! (Sh’mot 19:13). In other words, the Jubilee year is a commemoration of the Sinai experience, again reminding us of the inherent holiness of location – the Sinai model in Eretz Yisra’el.

We can now understand the inclusion of the various social-welfare Mitzvot in this Parashah: Each of them is associated with one of two directives: Ki Li ha’Aretz (the Land belongs to Me) or Li B’nei Yisra’el Avadim (the B’nei Yisra’el are My slaves). All of these Mitzvot are reminders that our ownership of the Land or of each other (as slaves) is merely an illusion and must be “corrected” every fifty years.

We can now address the double phrasing at the end of our Parashah: “Observe My Shabbatot and revere My Sanctuary, I am YHVH”. As mentioned, the sanctity of Shabbat is built into creation, it is part of the fabric of reality. Conversely, the sanctity of the Mishkan is a constructed holiness in which Man’s role is indispensable. The Torah is reminding us that both types of holiness are Godly and become unified within the matrix of Halakhah – “I am YHVH.”

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