

**Potomac Torah Study Center**  
Vol. 10 #29, May 12, 2023; 2, 21 Iyar 5783; Behar Bechukotai 5783 \*

**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 more than 50 years ago and was our family Rebbe and close friend until his untimely death.**

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

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Rabbi Mordechai Rhine and Rabbi Label Lam both remind us of the remarkable faith that a Torah observant Jew must have to observe the law of Shmittah. Every sixth year of a Shmittah cycle, a farmer must trust that his produce that year will be sufficient for the remainder of year six, all of year seven, and much of year eight (until bringing the Omer on the second day of Pesach permits the farmer to eat from new grain of year eight).

Jews who trust in Hashem and follow the mitzvot, including shmittah and yovel, tend to welcome children and teach their children and grandchildren the mitzvot. Their descendants provide a legacy that stays with them for many generations. Rabbi Rhine contrasts this legacy with a cemetery near Los Angeles where very wealthy people can purchase large portions to create fountains, waterfalls, and mosaics, with recorded music playing constantly, to celebrate their lives. Many of these people have no children, so their legacies consist of objects rather than descendants or mitzvot that they leave for future generations. For me, thinking of the legacy of Jewish children and grandchildren learning and observing mitzvot brings me pleasure while thinking of a legacy of a cemetery with objects but no surviving family gives me an empty feeling.

As I write late Thursday afternoon, 20 Iyar, it is the 3334<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the day that our ancestors departed from the base of Har Sinai to resume their journey to the land that Hashem had promised to our Avot and their descendants. The Torah in our double parsha emphasizes that the land will vomit the Jews out of our land if we fail to observe the requirements of shmittah and yovel (26:34-35). We always read this warning about week before Shavuot, the anniversary of when our ancestors received the Torah at Har Sinai.

Our history demonstrates why the period between Pesach and Shavuot is one of mourning. During this period, 24,000 of Rabbi Akiva's rabbinic students died from a plague, Crusaders killed and maimed many of our ancestors, the Nazis killed all the Jews who had been stuffed into the Warsaw ghetto, and Arab terrorists are increasing the frequency and magnitude of their attacks on Israel. This week, while we prepared for Lag B'Omer, our enemies have been flooding our country with rockets and other weapons, attempting to kill as many Israelis as possible. No wonder we recite Tachanun, use a special melody of sorrow for Lecha Dodi, and recite Av HaRachamim on Shabbat mornings during this period.

Our ancestors left Har Sinai with great rejoicing, but their great joy and hope died quickly, as we shall read starting with the sixth aliyah in three weeks. The Torah reminds us that failing to observe the mitzvot, especially shmittah and yovel, means that our enemies will expel us from the land with horrible violence and misery beyond belief. The Torah compensates by following with God's reassurance that He will remember His promises to our Avot and bring us back to the land (Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, z"l).

My beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, started me on a lifetime study of Torah and mitzvot more than half a century ago. Rabbi Cahan had strong ties to the land of Israel, the ties that are the primary theme of Behar and

Bechukotai. Rabbi Cahan's parents and sister made aliyah, and he visited many times (usually at least twice a year). His love for the land and for our mitzvot greatly influenced his family and many members of his congregation. An important part of his legacy is this love for our land and mitzvot – something that Hannah and I carry with us and have taught to our children. While we read of our ties to the land, Hannah is doing research, planning for a two week long family trip to Israel, including our sons, their wives, and all our grandchildren. Our double parsha emphasizes the mitzvot that enable us to keep the land, and we hope to make this love of Israel a part of the legacy that we leave to our descendants.

Shabbat Shalom,

Hannah and Alan

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**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](http://www.alephbeta.org). Please join me in supporting this wonderful organization, which has increased its scholarly work during and since the pandemic, despite many of its supporters having to cut back on their donations.**

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**Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Yoram Ben Shoshana, Leib Dovid ben Etel, Asher Shlomo ben Ettie, Avraham ben Gavriela, 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; Sharon bat Sarah, 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

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**\* Student to Student, a high school peer education program from the Jewish Community Relations Council:**

- Strives to reduce prejudice and bigotry
- Fosters understanding among peers
- Brings together Jewish students from different backgrounds
- Trains them to talk about their lives as Jewish teens
- Facilitates discussions in an effort to dismantle antisemitismPuts a human face to Judaism

Student to Student presentations take place in public and independent schools. Since this is a presentation by students for students, it is not perceived as "just another lecture" It resonates with the students and creates more of an informal discussion where questions are encouraged.

Join us for the 2023-2024 school year in sharing our lives as Jewish teens to break down stereotypes and foster increased understanding with other teens in our community:

NOMINATION AND APPLICATIONS ARE OPEN FOR THIS YEAR. Returning student applications and **nominations due by June 16.**

Please nominate rising Juniors and Seniors to participate in Student to Student 2023-24, at:

<https://www.jcouncil.org/form/student-student-nomination-form-2023-24>

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## Behar – Back to Sinai

By Rabbi Label Lam © 5763

Hashem spoke to Moses 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)*

*You shall perform My decrees and observe My ordinances and perform them; then you shall dwell securely in the land. The land will give its fruit and you will eat your fill; you will dwell securely upon it. If you will say: “What will we eat in the seventh year? -- Behold we will not sow and gather in our crops! I will ordain My blessing for you in the sixth year and it will yield a crop sufficient for a three-year period. (Vayikra 25: 18-22)*

Two questions are dominant here, and they may occupy a bigger place in our minds than many of us are ready to admit. 1) What's the relevance of Mount Sinai to the observance of the Sabbatical Year or anything else for that matter? 2) What are we going to eat? It could be these two questions have a close relationship as well.

The idea of a Sabbatical is very appealing. Why wait fifty years for retirement? Take a full paid vacation every seventh year. The logistical question arises. “How do we pay for such a thing? How does the economy continue to function, especially in an agricultural society?” The answer is simple. Only 1/7th of the fields are to cease, in much the same way universities operate. Not every faculty member is off in a given year. Yet, surprisingly, the Torah prescribes that the Sabbatical is to be observed simultaneously. We are all meant to leave the fields fallow in the very same year.

The question persists: “What are we going to eat?” How are we to feed our families?” Here's a practical approach that you don't have to be Allen Greenspan to think of. Each of us should put away a percentage of our crops every year in anticipation of the coming crunch. It may require foresight and self-discipline, but it solves the pressing problem.

“**No!**” says the Torah. The solution is, “*I will ordain My blessing for you in the sixth year and it will yield a crop sufficient for a three year period.*” Since we are not planting in the 7th, the 8th year is also a problem, but the 6th year will miraculously provide for the needs of the nation on the 6th, the 7th, and the 8th year. Wow!

How can anyone feel comfortable making such a mad request of an entire nation? If the promise is not delivered, how long would it take for the Torah to be discredited? That's right! Six years! No sooner than we would begin the honeymoon of our history in a new land then it would all be over. This is a program for economic and spiritual suicide. How could the Torah take such a massive risk in an area where there are such simple solutions, and why?

There was a biker going around a mountain curve when the road gave way and he found himself falling down to the ravine thousands of feet below. In the last moment, he managed to grab hold of a branch jutting from the side of the mountain. Barely holding on for his life he screamed for help but to no avail. Suddenly and miraculously a thunderous sound was heard echoing from the heavens. “*Is that You, Lord?*” inquired the man in desperation. “*Yes!*” boomed the voice. “*Help me!*” cried the man. “*I can't hold on much longer! What should I do?*” The heavenly reply, “*Just let go of the branch!*” Asks the man again: “*Is there anybody else up there?*”

Who would let go of that branch? Only an insane person or one who was certain that it was in fact The Almighty delivering

the directive. To have the nerve to observe the Sabbatical Year requires being plugged into the historical reality of “Mount Sinai” in a sober way. Similarly, living the Sabbatical Year has the potential to reawaken and reaffirm the veracity of that national event. The Vilna Gaon writes, “*The main function of the giving of the Torah is to inspire trust in Hashem.*” Therefore, every courageous little Mitzvah step we take, though thousands of miles and years from that place emanates from and beckons us back to Sinai.

Good Shabbos!

<https://torah.org/torah-portion/dvartorah-5763-behar/>

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## Has our Relationship Lost its Sizzle?

by Rabbi Dov Linzer, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah © 2014, 2023

In the blessings to be bestowed on the people if they follow God’s commandments and observe God’s laws — the rains will come in their appointed season, the land will bring forth its fruit, there will be peace in the land, and the people will be fruitful and multiply — it finishes with a bizarre verse “*I will place my Tabernacle (mishkan) in your midst, and My soul will not abhor you*” (Vayikra 26:11). What are we to make of this anti-climax? Of course God will not abhor us! We are living a fully religious life and are worthy of all these blessings. Why should this blessing — if that’s what it is — be necessary?

The answer is in the first half of the verse: things may change once the Tabernacle is in our midst, not necessarily for the better. We are lacking as long as we are without a mishkan, a structure of kedusha. We have not yet achieved our full religious potential, and we must continue to strive and reach. Without a mishkan, we will live our lives driven by *kedoshim ti’hiyu*, you shall become holy, striving to better actualize the divine within ourselves, never able to reach our ultimate goal.

Once God’s mishkan is in our midst, however, we may think we have arrived. There is no striving left to do. With this attitude comes great danger, for we will not stop to take stock of ourselves. We will not ask if there is more we could do, are we doing everything properly, or are we being properly responsive to the world around us. We will become religiously complacent and self-satisfied and come to believe we are the only ones with the truth. Our sole mission will be to protect the truth and our mishkanim — concretized embodiments of God’s presence — against defilement and impurity. We will divide the world into insiders and outsiders, with outsiders seen as no consequence, and at worst dangerous or evil.

The mishkan in our midst is a two-edged sword, a blessing with very real risk. We can understand why the verse says, “*And my soul will not abhor you.*” Not a consequence of what preceded, but a second blessing. Even with the mishkan in your midst, you will not become a people abhorrent to God, who have abandoned true kedusha and become so self-righteously satisfied with their own religiosity. You will succeed at having God’s mishkan while remaining true to God’s Torah.

How will this be achieved? The answer is in the verse: “*And I will walk (vi’hitalkhi) in your midst, and I will be your God and you will be my people*” (Vayikra 26:12). God will move among us. We will experience God as a moving presence, constantly urging us to act, respond, and not stay still. When God is moving, you know God is near, but you will never know exactly where God is. The uncertainty keeps us striving, looking inward to take stock of ourselves and where we are, and looking out to seek that connection with God’s presence.

Hithalekh occurs multiple times in Breishit in the context of the human relationship to God. Adam and Eve hear the sound of God moving about, mit’haleikh, in the garden. The sense of an imminent encounter with God forces them to hide out of shame; they look at themselves honestly, knowing God will soon be looking. Becoming righteous is defined as walking before God in many instances: “*And Hanoch walked before God*” (Gen. 5:22); “*Before God did Noah walk*” (Gen. 6:9); “*God appeared to Avram and said to him: Walk before Me and be perfect*” (Gen. 17:1)

If we see God’s presence in our midst as static, then our religiosity will be static. If we see God as moving in our midst, then we will seek God out. We will seek opportunities to grow, to reach God, to understand what it is that we must do in the world. The relationship will be dynamic; it will be alive. Hence the verse that begins with, “*I will walk in your midst,*”

concludes with, “*and I will be your God and you will be my people.*”

The Orthodox community has fallen short of this vision of a vibrant, dynamic religiosity. Our various mishkanim, institutionalized embodiments, often lead to stasis, complacency, and religious self-satisfaction. Only by reintroducing the mandate to mithalekh — to move, grow, and respond to the outside world and contemporary challenges — can we hope to maintain a true relationship with God. Only a religious vision such as this can allow us to connect to all those who have become alienated, who have been told, implicitly or explicitly, that they have no place in our mishkan, they are threats, they are not worthy and not wanted. Only such a religious vision will bring life and growth to those committed to Torah and mitzvot but who see in religion only the forms, only preserving and protecting rather than moving and growing.

We must be prepared to look inward to see what must be changed, and outward to see what must be done to bring the light of Torah to the larger Jewish world. May we have God’s help to continue on this path and have hatzlacha in all we do, so we may be blessed to see fulfilled in our days the blessing, “*I will be your God and you will be my people.*”

Shabbat Shalom!

<https://library.yctorah.org/2023/05/has-our-relationship-lost-its-sizzle/>

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## **Wealth, Poverty, Morality: Thoughts for Behar/Behukkotai**

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel \*

Recent news programs featured stories that are stark reminders of problems facing humanity. One story described the abject poverty in south Sudan, where flooding has destroyed farmlands and where starvation is everywhere. Children with distended stomachs cry for sustenance. Another story spoke of athletes who were signing contracts for hundreds of millions of dollars...just to play baseball, basketball or football.

What kind of world tolerates horrific poverty, while rewarding athletes and entertainers with staggering amounts of money?

Another news item described New York City as the richest city in the world. Yet, when I walk the streets of New York I daily see homeless people and beggars. While some New Yorkers have millions and billions of dollars, others don’t have a decent place to live and don’t know where their next meal is coming from.

A society — and a world — which has such vast gaps between the wealthy and the poor has a deep moral problem along with the deep economic problem.

The Torah legislation on behalf of the poor and oppressed is highlighted in this week’s Torah reading. Farmers are obligated to leave portions of their fields unharvested, allocating it for the poor. Lenders are not allowed to charge interest on their loans to fellow Israelites. Society has an obligation to protect widows and orphans and all others who are vulnerable and unprotected.

On each seventh year, debts are cancelled. On each fiftieth year, land was returned to the family which originally owned it. The result of these laws was to prevent chronic poverty within families. The younger generations did not inherit an overwhelming burden of debts from the older generations; and a family could look forward to a definite time when their property — which they may have had to sell in desperation — would be returned to them.

While inequalities in income will always exist, the gap between the rich and the poor must not be allowed to undercut moral responsibilities. Those who have more are obligated to help those who have less. The goal for a society is to ensure the wellbeing of all, not the enrichment of a privileged few while masses of people go hungry.

When we see the shocking inequalities in our world, we must recognize a fundamental moral/spiritual component. The Torah emphasizes social responsibility; when the religious/idealistic aspect is removed, people tend to focus only on

themselves, on how they can amass more money, more entertainment, more personal pleasures.

When we see children dying of starvation while athletes are paid hundreds of millions of dollars, we are witnessing a serious social disease. When we ourselves pay more money for tickets to sports or entertainment events than we contribute to charity, we are part of the problem.

In his book, *The Moral Consequences of Economic Growth* (Vintage Paperback, 2006), Professor Benjamin Friedman of Harvard University points out that economic life and moral life are intertwined. When economies grow for general society, people tend to be more generous, tolerant, and considerate of the needs of others. But when large portions of the population feel that they are losing ground economically, the foundations of a stable, moral society are shaken.

The Torah teaches us that society is best served when all of us look out for each other; when the poor, the widow and orphan are not left behind; when we realize that we each have a role to play in creating a fairer, more moral and idealistic world.

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

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<https://www.jewishideas.org/article/wealth-poverty-morality-thoughts-beharbehukkotai>

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## **Eulogy at Wounded Knee**

By Rabbi Marc 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.

<https://www.jewishideas.org/article/eulogy-wounded-knee>

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### **Behar-Bechukotai: Staying Grounded**

by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine \*

The mitzva of Shemita is a remarkable act of trust. Every seventh year, the farmer allows his land to go unattended. The Talmud ascribes to such farmers the verse in Tehillim 103: "Strong people who listen to His word." Despite the strong sense of responsibility the farmer has for his family, he displays angelic trust and fortitude that all will work out and he will be able to provide. In the name of observance, he allows his land to go unattended.

In addition to being an experience of trust and fortitude, the farmer also attests to the fact that the land belongs to Hashem. When the Owner instructs him to have the land go fallow, he does so. Strangers can wander in and pick the fruit. The owner himself can also pick, just like everyone else. But he cannot plant, tend, or limit access to the field as in other years. The message is that we are all equally guests of Hashem in this world, regardless of how much real estate we have accumulated. Hashem is the real owner of the fields. Man is but a custodian on his belongings, hopefully to use them well.

On a very personal level, Shemita helps keep our perspective regarding work, assets, and life in balance. Each person has work responsibilities. But a healthy perspective needs to include other priorities. In Shemita observance, the year of Shemita provides a release from work and enables the farmer to focus on his relationship with family, with Hashem, and devote more time to Torah study. Instead of thinking of work as the bedrock of life, the farmer stops at times and recognizes other priorities.

Although most of us are not farmers observing Shemita, realizing that there are priorities beyond work is critical. There are times that we have to say, "No" to pursuing assets, as we prioritize other valuable aspects of our lives.

The story is told of two brothers who were in intense disagreement over a piece of property. Each one felt that their father meant the field to be to their side of the family as an inheritance. Not only were the brothers' families no longer on speaking terms, but the disagreement spilled over into the community which became split over the disagreement. Eventually the case made its way to the town Rabbi. The Rabbi listened to the arguments and counter arguments that were ripping the town into factions and then he said, "I have heard statements from both of you. Now we must go and hear what the piece of land has to say."

Intrigued, the brothers accompanied the Rabbi to the field where the Rabbi bent down to the ground as if to listen to its words. After a few moments he stood straight and said, "Quite interesting, really quite interesting. The land says, 'They each claim that I belong to them, but the truth is that after 120 they will both belong to me.'"

The mitzva of Shemita helps keep us grounded with a healthy perspective of ourselves and our belongings. "What is worth more to you?" is a question we can ask ourselves. Sometimes it makes sense to let go for the sake of a higher cause such as Shalom.

I am told that in California there is a fantasy-like cemetery for very wealthy people. There, people who did not want to part with their money during their lifetime can buy large pieces of land in which they will be buried. They can have fountains and waterfalls, mosaics, and the most beautiful, recorded music. Too often, if you were to go and read the monument you would find that the sense of legacy is missing. Too often, the deceased left no children, no family, and no causes.

A Jew who internalizes the messages of Shemita will find it easier to trust, to share, to host, and to give. Our assets are a gift from Hashem to be used wisely. As the Mishna in Avos 3:7( explains, "From Your hand comes everything, such that when we give, it is an allocation of Yours that we give."

With best wishes for a wonderful Shabbos!

\* Rabbi Mordechai Rhine is a certified mediator and coach with Rabbinic experience of more than 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](http://www.care-mediation.com) and [www.teach613.org](http://www.teach613.org); his email is [RMRhine@gmail.com](mailto:RMRhine@gmail.com). For information or to join any Torah613 classes, contact Rabbi Rhine.

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## Behar-Bechukosai -- The Real World Is G-d's World

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer\* © 2023

The land of Israel was divided among the Jewish people as an eternal inheritance. Each family received their own portion of the land, and it was passed down from one generation to the next. The Torah instructs us that even if lands are sold, the lands should return to their ancestral inheritance in the Jubilee year. Furthermore, even before the Jubilee, a relative has a right to come and redeem the field.

Rash"i quotes a Medrash Torah Kohanim which adds that the language of the Torah takes this even further. When describing the situation where one has sold his property, the Torah writes, "When your brother becomes destitute and sells of his inheritance" (Vayikra 25:25). The Torah is telling us that one is not allowed to sell his land unless he is poor and needs the money. In addition, even when he needs the money, he can only sell "of his property" not all of his property. He has to keep some for himself.

The Tzeidah Laderech (*ibid.*) notes that when Rash"i quotes this Medrash, he slightly changes the message. Instead of saying that one is forbidden to sell all of his property at once, Rash"i says, "Of his property, and not his entire property, the Torah is teaching *derekh eretz* (literally, the way of the land) that one should retain a field for himself." The Tzeidah Laderech quotes the actual words of the Medrash:

*One might think that he could have sold all of his property at once, the Torah teaches, 'of his inheritance' and not his entire inheritance. Rabi Elazar ben Azaryah said, 'If we find regarding G-d that one is not allowed to consecrate all of his properties at once (to the Temple), how much more so (when selling to another human being) is a person obligated to care about his property.'*

Based on this he asks two questions on Rash"i. First, why didn't Rash"i say that this is an obligation, the way the Torah Kohanim says it? Second, the Medrash only discussed the laws of inheritance, and did not mention proper conduct. Where did Rash"i learn this lesson of *derekh eretz*?

He explains that Rash"i understood that the obligation to keep a field for himself could not be an actual obligation in the standard sense. The Torah has already taught us that one is only allowed to sell his property if he is destitute and in desperate need of funds. How can we be obligating him to keep a field for himself, if he is only selling the land because he is destitute? Surely, we are not telling him that he has to keep his field when he doesn't have money for food. Rash"i therefore understood that this Medrash is referring to a "law" of *derekh eretz*, and not a biblical law. It is the "law" of normal human psychology and healthy human conduct to keep a field for oneself, if possible, even when he is in need of cash. We should learn from here that any time one needs to sell his assets, he should keep a source of income for himself, if possible.

This understanding of the Medrash is very difficult to put into the actual words of the Medrash. The Medrash clearly states that there is an obligation to care about ones property and not sell it all at once. How can Rash"i say that means *derekh eretz* and not an obligation?

In the language of the Rabbis, the word "obligation" can be used in different contexts. Sometimes an obligation can refer to a moral or philosophical obligation, where a person is technically allowed to do otherwise. Obligation, in this sense, means the right way to act or what a person should do. Rash"i is calling this type of obligation, *derekh eretz*, or the way of the land. G-d created a world where we need to work to achieve our basic human needs. It is, therefore, wise to plan ahead when selling ones land and keep some for himself. In other words, the Torah is instructing us here to recognize the reality of the way this world functions and to act accordingly. The "real world" is in fact G-d's world. He created it the way it is and wants us to respect the reality He created. Respecting the realities G-d has created and planning accordingly is part of serving G-d.

\* Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD.

## **Behar - Bechukotai**

By Rabbi Herzl Hefter \*

[I did not receive a Dvar Torah from Rabbi Hefter this week. Look to this spot for future Devrei Torah from Rabbi Hefter.]

\* Founder and dean of the Har'el Beit Midrash in Jerusalem. Rabbi Hefter is a graduate of Yeshiva University and was ordained at Yeshivat Har Etzion. For more of his writings, see [www.har-el.org](http://www.har-el.org). To support the Beit Midrash, as we do, send donations to America Friends of Beit Midrash Har'el, 66 Cherry Lane, Teaneck, NJ 07666.

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## **Construction on Shabbat**

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia \*

Question: Is it allowed to let non-Jewish contractors work on Shabbat in construction? Is there a difference between a private home and a public facility?

Answer: interestingly enough, the halakhic literature contains numerous discussions on this topic. I will present here an excerpt of the encyclopedic discussion of Rabbi Ovadia Yossef in his *Yabia Omer* )Vol. 8, Orah Hayyim, 28(.

### **The Los Angeles Case**

Rabbi Yossef was asked by the rabbi of Congregation Adat Yeshurun in LA's San Fernando Valley whether it is allowed to use a synagogue which was built around the clock, including Shabbat and holidays. It is not clear if the rabbi asking the question is associated with the congregation or if the congregation even has a rabbi, but the argument was that the board of directors at the time of the construction was not knowledgeable and did not care about observing the Mitzvot. After completing the construction, a new board of directors, more observant, was elected. The new board wanted to know if the community is allowed to use the synagogue, or if it considered a product of a sinful action.

Rabbi Yossef answers with presenting two opposing opinions of early medieval rabbis:

Rabbenu Tam considers allowing the building of a house on Shabbat, if the payment is per job and not per day, because it is the decision of the builder on which days to work.

Rabbenu Yitzhak holds that it is forbidden because contractors are usually hired on a daily basis and the onlookers will think that the Jew ordered the non-Jew to perform work on Shabbat.

Even though Rabbenu Tam ruled in favor of continuing on Shabbat, he did not want to rely on his ruling when building his own house. Many other rabbis ruled that construction on Shabbat is forbidden, among them: HaTerumah, HaMaor, Shibbole HaLekket, Ramban, Rashba, Ritva, Or Zarua, Hagahot Maimoni, and Hagahot Asheri. It is also clearly so stated by Maimonides, and the Shulhan Arukh agrees with him )Maimonides, Laws of Shabbat 6:13; Shulhan Arukh, 244:1(.

It seems, however, that all depends on local work and contracting practices, and if the norm is to pay per job and not per day, it will be allowed to let the contractor work on Shabbat.

Rabbi Yossef concludes this part of the discussion by saying that since this is a rabbinic prohibition, we could rely on the lenient opinion. His statement requires further explanation so let me illuminate here a general rule regarding the use of the services of a non-Jew on Shabbat.

### **Asking a non-Jew to do work on Shabbat**

According to the Torah, hired workers can do any work on Shabbat. The Torah only limited the work of slaves who were considered property of their masters. They had to rest just as the property of the master, including animals and fields, had to rest. During rabbinic time, as the economic system shifted from slavery to hired workforce, more and more people bypassed the prohibitions of Shabbat by asking non-Jews to do their work for them.

In order to put an end to this phenomenon, the rabbis decreed that one cannot ask a non-Jew to do work for him on Shabbat. They knew, however, that there will be situations where the help of a non-Jew will be needed, and they therefore left a back door to bypass their own prohibition. That back door, or loophole, has to do with activities which are only forbidden because of rabbinic law, or when there is a great need.

For centuries Jews refrained from using the services of non-Jews, mainly in order to avoid mockery for “tricking” their own legal system. During the long stay of Jews in medieval Europe, though, a change occurred. Because of the cold weather, it became very common to rely on non-Jews to light fire for heating, and as a result the non-Jews came to understand that asking for their help is an integral part of the Jewish legal system (Chatam Sofer responsa, Orah Haim, 1:59).

Understanding the historical development of asking a non-Jew to do work on Shabbat is important since it applies to many aspects of Jewish life on Shabbat, especially outside Israel. Once we understand that we are not bypassing Halakha by asking a non-Jew to help us, but rather we are using a path created for us by the rabbis, we can use this Halakhic device more wisely and without feeling of guilty for tweaking or cheating the legal system.

### **Working per job or per day**

Let us return now to the issue of construction. R Yosef writes that since today the norm is to hire contractors per job, and it's their choice on which days to work, it is allowed to continue construction on Shabbat.

R Yosef then quotes R Yom Tov Tzahalon, who opposes this ruling on the grounds that even though most people hire workers per job and not per day, not everyone is familiar with the fine distinction between the two, and people will think that Shabbat is being transgressed (Responsa, 66). Rabbi Tzahalon concludes that one can hire a non-Jew to do work only with portable objects.

This argument is refuted by the author of Shemen HaMish-ha, who writes that it is the obligation of the onlookers to research the details of the type of work done and the halakhic parameters, and once they do that, they will know that no prohibition has been transgressed (Shemen HaMishcha, 16:3.)

After all this, there could still be a problem, according to some poskim, if the chief contractor hires day workers. Some say that it is if the Jew hired day workers, which is forbidden, while others argue that since the contractor is directly responsible to hire, fire, and pay these workers, there is no room for such concerns.

Rabbi Yair Bacharach adds that a case like that should be permissible, since a Jew is allowed to tell a non-Jew to do work for him through a mediator, meaning that he will tell one person to tell another person to do the work (Chavot Yair, 53).

### **Building a Synagogue**

The discussion so far dealt with construction in general, but when it comes to construction of a synagogue, there are additional considerations. The Magen Avraham, Rabbi Yehudah Ayash, and Rabbi Yehudah Assad, among others, vehemently opposed it because they felt that it shows disrespect for Shabbat and that people will think that the rabbis create a separate system of Halakha to satisfy their needs (Magen Avraham 244:8; Mateh Yehudah 244:4; and others).

Despite their objections, other poskim write that if there is a concern that forbidding work of non-Jews on Shabbat might cause the construction to stop altogether, and the synagogue will never be built, it is allowed to continue construction on Shabbat. Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, who lived under an oppressive regime, explains that the concern is that the

government will change its mind and will not let the Jews finish the construction of the synagogue.

This continuous swaying between proponents and opponents of construction on Shabbat reflects the dilemma of balancing the needs of the community, including financial considerations and dependence on the government, with the moral, emotional, and ideological cost of allowing such actions, and it seems that the decision remains in hands of the local rabbi, and if applicable, his board as well.

### **The Adat Yeshurun Conclusion:**

Rabbi Yosef's conclusion regarding the synagogue in LA which was built on Shabbat was that now that it is already done, it is allowed to use the facilities, for the following reasons:

It was built for a Mitzvah, so people will judge those in charge of the project

Most people hire workers per job, and not per day, which is permissible for all types of work.

There are many poskim who say that when dealing with a public facility, the need to serve the public overrides the concern of "what will people think?"

The board who was in charge of the construction represents the people, and the people can claim that they should not bear negative consequences of their deeds. In the language of the Talmud, the people can tell the board: "*We appointed you to do good and not to cause harm.*"

### **So, may one let the contractor continue?**

The ruling of Rabbi Yosef refers to a case where the Synagogue was already built, but the question remains, in light of the many concerns and disputes, whether one should continue or stop construction on Shabbat.

There is no definitive answer, since one might argue that even though it is allowed according to Halakha, it still doesn't feel right and sends a wrong message to the public about the sanctity of Shabbat and how it can be bypassed in certain cases. The continuous swaying between proponents and opponents of construction on Shabbat reflects the dilemma of balancing the needs of the community, including financial considerations and dependence on the government, with the moral, emotional, and ideological cost of allowing such actions, and it seems that the decision remains in hands of the local rabbi, and if applicable, his board as well.

However, from a practical point of view, all poskim agree that the problems with continuing construction on Shabbat are all related to the way people perceive and judge that activity.

It is therefore recommended that if indeed construction must be continued on Shabbat for financial, communal, or other considerations, large signs will be placed at all corners of the construction site. The signs will explain in simple language the principles presented here and the motives of the board which is in charge of the project to continue construction on Shabbat. Similar messages should be posted on the Synagogue's website and distributed by mail to neighbors of the construction site.

In that manner there will be no concern about misperception, and the builders of the synagogue will have followed the directive: "*you shall do what is right in the eyes of both God and humans*" )Numbers 32:22(.

\* Torah VeAhava. 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/aim-ovadia?tab=sheets> . The Sefaria articles usually include Hebrew text, which I must delete because of issues changing software formats.

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## Living in Holy Time

By Rabbi Josh Pernick \*

From the very beginning, the Torah directs us to sanctify time. The first day in the Torah concludes: “*there was evening, there was morning, one day*”) Gen 1:5(. We are commanded in the first mitzvah given to our people as a nation:

*This month shall be for you the first of months, this renewal shall be for you a beginning of renewals. )Ex. 12:2(*

Both days and months are units of time associated with astronomical phenomena; the rotation of the earth, and the revolution of the moon. But there is one set of cycles that the Torah introduces which is entirely divorced from any overt natural occurrence; the cycle of sevens. While we are introduced to the concept of the week in Breishit, we are introduced to a broader cycle of sevens in Emor, the counting of the Omer.

Behar-Bechukotai takes this into overdrive, building an entire structure of time upon this cycle of sevens. Count six years, and the seventh is a Shabbat, a Shmita year. Count seven sets of seven years and the fiftieth year is the Yovel, the Jubilee.

Behar-Bechukotai, and this whole cycle of sevens, is not about obsession with a number. They serve a broader purpose; that of making time holy. Of creating space in a world of physical time for spiritual time. This is the process that we find ourselves in today, of finding particular ways of sanctifying each day of the Omer count.

But we also create and ritualize gaps in time. We separate one day of the week from the other six; one year from the week of years. We make space in our physical world for purely spiritual time, devoted less to renewal than to reflection and release.

Even in our physical world, there are gaps in time waiting to be sanctified. It’s always struck me that our astronomical markers of time do not line up perfectly; a lunar year of twelve months lasts at most 355 days. A solar year lasts 365 ¼. We are left with a gap of time, ten days, in which the solar and lunar cycle aren’t aligned.

At a practical level, this gap was repaired by the institution of leap years. But the particular length of this gap, ten days, is striking. We know of ten day gaps in time.

Masechet Rosh Hashanah 8b records a discussion of this particular gap of time with relevance to the section of our parshah devoted to the releasing of slaves in the Yovel year.

*Rabbi Yishmael, son of Rabbi Yohanan ben Beroka, said: From Rosh HaShana until Yom Kippur of the Jubilee Year, Hebrew slaves were not released to their homes because the shofar had not yet been sounded. And they were also not enslaved to their masters. Rather, they would eat, drink, and rejoice, and wear their crowns on their heads. Once Yom Kippur arrived, the court would sound the shofar, slaves would be released to their original houses, and fields that were sold would be returned to their original owners.*

Behar-Bechukotai presents a model of a world to strive towards, one in which inequality is recognized and repaired, in which the full humanity of all is realized and restored. In which masters and slaves can sit together at one table eating and drinking and rejoicing, building up the world. May we all work on building that world together.

\* Rabbi in Residence and Director of Jewish Life and Community Relations at the Jewish Federation of Greater New Haven. Distinguished alumnus of Yeshivat Chovevi Torah. Hebrew omitted because of problems going across various software programs.

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## **Shavuon Behar Bechukotai**

By Rabbi Moshe Rube \*

There are three things I learned from attending and representing the Jewish community at a Church service to mark the coronation of King Charles III.

One is the British are really good at pomp and ceremony. If you thought our Shabbat service was complicated, then you have not been to a church coronation celebration yet with all its players, vergers, representatives, schedulers, text-readers and song-singers coordinated to perform at an exact time at their exact place in the exact way they have been training for weeks and months to do. All serve to make a delightful pastiche of imagery, ritual and music that could relax any stiff upper lip into a smile.

The second is that "Zadok the Priest" could still top a hits chart today. After 250 years, it still manages to surprise and elevate the crowds with its chord changes, choral shouts of "Long Live the King," and melismatic "Alleluia." Handel really hit it out of the park with this one, and I took just a bit of pride that the British still anoint the king with reference to our Jewish King Solomon.

Third is that Bishops can give a good drosh. Pictured here (in the New Zealand E-mail) is the Anglican Bishop of Auckland, Bishop Ross Bay. As part of his drosh for the evening, he quoted Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, from his book *The Dignity of Difference*, that we must not only celebrate what makes us similar but also celebrate our differences. With the diversity of people and faith representatives there that night, we must all remember to look for what's different about us, appreciate, nurture and be curious about it.

Bishop Bay made me think about the end of Leviticus this week, where God exhorts the Jews to follow our own laws and forge our own identities. This book of the Torah is the most chock-full of interpersonal and intrapersonal statutes which were given specifically to the Jews. But having our own identity differentiates us from others in a way that allows us to recognize and appreciate others' identities. Going through this Leviticus-process on our own lets us see and be sensitive to the process in others as well. If you really want to give a compliment to someone, comment positively on their style of dress, way of speaking and unique breadth of knowledge. In other words, find what makes them stand out and celebrate it.

Our differences provide us with the dignity to come together whether at coronation celebrations, social sporting events or religious services. May we always be able to celebrate those differences and allow them to bring us together, as well as to set us apart.

Shabbat Shalom!

Rabbi Rube

\* Senior Rabbi of Auckland Hebrew Congregation, Remuera (Auckland), New Zealand.

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## **Rav Kook Torah**

### **Bechukotai: Why Exile?**

The Torah warns us that if we fail to listen to God and keep His mitzvot, we will be punished with famine, war, and ultimately — exile.

*"I will scatter you among the nations, and keep the sword drawn against you. Your land will remain desolate, and your cities in ruins." (Lev. 26:33)*

**The Purpose of Israel in their Land**

Why should the Jewish people be punished with exile? To answer this question, we must first understand the true significance of residing in the Land of Israel. If the goal of the Jewish people is to bring ethical monotheism to the world, would their mission not be more effectively fulfilled when they are scattered among the nations?

There is, however, a unique reason for the Jewish people to live in the Land of Israel. They need to dwell together in the Land so that there will be a nation in the world upon whom God's honor rests; a nation for whom Divine providence is revealed in its history and circumstances; a nation that will be a source for all peoples to absorb knowledge of God and His ways. Their goal is to demonstrate that Divine morality can fill an entire nation — a morality that enlightens not only the private lives of individuals, but also guides the public paths of nations.

For the Jewish people to fulfill their national destiny, God's seal must be placed on the people as a whole. The nation must recognize its special mission as God's people living in His land. When the Jewish people as a whole abandoned God, even though many individuals still kept some of the mitzvot, the nation had lost their distinctive mark. The land was no longer recognizable as God's land, and the nation was no longer recognizable as God's nation. They saw themselves as a people like all others.

At that point, the Jewish people required exile. They needed to wander among the nations, stripped of all national assets. During this exile, they discovered that they are different and distinct from all other peoples. They realized that the essence of their nationhood contains a special quality; and that special quality is God's Name that is associated with them.

### **Staying in Babylonia**

We find in the Talmud (Shabbat 41a) a startling opinion regarding the nature of exile. When fourth-century scholar Rabbi Zeira wished to ascend to the Land of Israel, he needed to evade his teacher, Rabbi Yehudah. For Rabbi Yehudah taught that anyone leaving Babylonia for the Land of Israel transgresses the positive command, "*They will be carried to Babylon, and there they shall stay, until the day that I remember them*" (Jeremiah 27:22). Rabbi Zeira, however, disagreed with this interpretation. He held that the prophecy only referred to vessels of the holy Temple. (1)

Why did Rabbi Yehudah think that moving to the Land of Israel was so improper?

Babylonia at that time was the world center of Torah study. Great academies were established in Neharde'a, Sura and Pumbeditha. Jewish life in Babylonia was centered around the holiness of Torah. This great revival of Torah learning instilled a profound recognition of the true essence of the Jewish people. As such, Babylonia was the key to the redemption of Israel and their return to their land. Only when the Jewish people fully assimilate this lesson will the exile have fulfilled its purpose, and the Jewish people will be able to return to their land.

Rabbi Yehudah felt that individuals, even if they have already prepared themselves sufficiently for the holiness of the Land of Israel, should nonetheless remain in Babylonia. Why? The object of exile is not to correct the individual, but to correct the nation. The true significance of the Jewish people living in the Land of Israel — as an entire nation bearing the banner of the Rock of Israel — must not be obscured by the return of righteous individuals to the Land.

For Rabbi Yehudah, each individual Jew is like a Temple vessel. A vessel cannot fulfill its true purpose by itself, without the overall framework of a functioning Temple. So too, an individual can only join in the renascence of Israel in their Holy Land when the entire nation has been restored in its Land, via divine redemption.

(1) *Gold from the Land of Israel*, pp. 218-220. Adapted from *Ein Eyah* vol. IV, p. 2.(

### **FOOTNOTE:**

Note: Maimonides ruled that "*Just as one may not leave the Land of Israel, so too one may not leave Babylonia*" (Laws of Kings 5:12). It is not clear, however, whether the prohibition to leave Babylonia included ascending to the Land of Israel or not (see Kesef Mishneh ad. loc; Pe'at Hashulchan; Eretz Hermdah pp. 30-34).

With the decline of Babylonia as the center of Torah scholarship during the Middle Ages, this prohibition became irrelevant, and is not mentioned in the Shulchan Aruch. See also Pitchai Teshuvah in Even Ha-Ezer 75:6, who ruled that the mitzvah of ascending to the Land of Israel applies to all times.

[https://www.ravkooktorah.org/BECHUKOTAI\\_65.htm](https://www.ravkooktorah.org/BECHUKOTAI_65.htm)

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## **The Eternal People )Behar-Bechukotai 5769(**

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

The book of Vayikra ends with one of the most terrifying passages in literature. It describes what will happen to the Israelites if, having made their covenant with God, they break its terms:

*"If in spite of this you still do not listen to me but continue to be hostile toward me, then in my anger I will be hostile toward you, and I myself will punish you for your sins seven times over . . . I will turn your cities into ruins and lay waste your sanctuaries, and I will take no delight in the pleasing aroma of your offerings. I will lay waste the land, so that your enemies who live there will be appalled. I will scatter you among the nations and will draw out my sword and pursue you. Your land will be laid waste, and your cities will lie in ruins . . . As for those of you who are left, I will make their hearts so fearful in the lands of their enemies that the sound of a windblown leaf will put them to flight. They will run as though fleeing from the sword, and they will fall, even though no one is pursuing them."* Leviticus 26:28-36

To this day we read the passage – traditionally known as the Tochachah, *"the admonition"* – sotto voce, so fearful is it and so difficult to internalize and imagine. It is all the more fearful given what we know of later Jewish history.

Tragically, more than once, it came true. The Jewish people has had more than its share of sufferings and persecutions. Its commitment to the terms of the covenant – to be *"a kingdom of priests and a holy nation"* – was and still is anything but safe, an easy option, a low-risk strategy. Of the people He claimed as His own, God is demanding. When Israel do His will, they are lifted to great heights. When they do not, they are plunged into great depths. The way of holiness is supremely challenging.

Yet at the very climax of this long list of curses, there comes a passage surpassing in its assurance:

*. . . but when the time finally comes that their stubborn spirit is humbled, I will forgive their sin. I will remember my covenant with Jacob, as well as my covenant with Isaac and my covenant with Abraham, and I will remember the land . . . Thus, even when they are in their enemy's land, I will not reject them or spurn them, bringing them to an end and breaking My covenant with them, because I am the Lord their God.* Leviticus 26:41-44

The people of the eternal God will itself be eternal. There is, in the Mosaic books, no greater promise than this. It is repeated in the prophetic literature by the man often thought of as the most pessimistic of the prophets, Jeremiah. Jeremiah spent much of his career as a prophet warning the people of impending disaster. It was an unpopular message, and he was imprisoned and nearly killed for it. Yet he too, in the midst of his gloom, told the people that they would never be destroyed:

*This is what the Lord says, He who appoints the sun to shine by day, who decrees the moon and stars to shine by night, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar – the Lord Almighty is His name:*

*"Only if these decrees vanish from My sight," declares the Lord, "will the descendants of Israel ever cease to be a nation before Me."* Jeremiah 31:35-36

In the Cairo Museum stands a giant slab of black granite known as the Merneptah stele. Originally installed by Pharaoh Amenhotep III in his temple in western Thebes, it was removed by a later ruler of Egypt, Merneptah, who reigned in the thirteenth century BCE. Inscribed with hieroglyphics, it contains a record of Merneptah's military victories. Its interest might have been confined to students of ancient civilizations, were it not for one fact: the stele contains the first reference outside the Bible to the people of Israel. The inscription lists the various powers crushed by Merneptah and his army. It concludes:

*All lands together, they are pacified;  
Everyone who was restless, he has been bound  
By the king of Upper and Lower Egypt . . .*

Among those who were restless were a small people otherwise not mentioned in the early Egyptian texts. Merneptah or his chroniclers believed that they were now a mere footnote to history. They had not simply been defeated. They had been obliterated. This is what the stele says:

*Israel is laid waste, his seed is not.*

The first reference to Israel outside the Bible is an obituary notice.

Ironically, so is the second. This is contained in a basalt slab dating from the 9th century BCE which today stands in the Louvre. Known as the Mesha stele, it records the triumphs of Mesha, king of Moab. The king thanks his deity Chemosh for handing victory to the Moabites in their wars, our lights in the war is, and speaks thus:

*"As for Omri, king of Israel, he humbled Moab for many years, for Chemosh was angry with his land. And his son followed him, and he also said, 'I will humble Moab.' In my time he spoke thus, but I have triumphed over him and over his house, while Israel has perished for ever."*

The great mathematician and later Christian theologian Blaise Pascal wrote this:

*It is certain that in certain parts of the world we can see a peculiar people, separated from the other peoples of the world, and this is called the Jewish people... This people is not only of remarkable antiquity but has also lasted for a singularly long time... For whereas the peoples of Greece and Italy, of Sparta, Athens and Rome, and others who came so much later have perished so long ago, these still exist, despite the efforts of so many powerful kings who have tried a hundred times to wipe them out, as their historians testify, and as can easily be judged by the natural order of things over such a long spell of years. They have always been preserved, however, and their preservation was foretold... My encounter with his people amazes me.*

Many attempts have been made, over the course of the centuries, to prove the existence of God. Theologians have argued on the basis of philosophy, and in some cases the natural sciences )the "argument from design"(. Yet the Torah speaks of a different kind of proof altogether: the history of Israel.

There is pain in this history. At times it was written in tears. Yet it remains astonishing. The curses of the Tochachah came true – but so did the consolation. No nation was attacked so often. None attracted so much irrational hostility. Empire after empire pronounced their destruction. Yet they have vanished into oblivion while the people Israel still lives, small, vulnerable, sometimes fractious and rebellious, yet still there, defying all the natural laws that govern the history of nations. There is a mystery here, as Pascal so clearly saw. Yet its basic formulation is clear, and despite all the odds it came true: the people of the eternal God became the people of eternity.

<https://www.rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/behavior/the-eternal-people/>

Note: because Likutei Torah and the Internet Parsha Sheet, both attached by E-mail, normally include the two most recent Devrei Torah by Rabbi Sacks, I have selected an earlier Dvar. The archives do not include footnotes for this Devar Torah.

## Are Mysteries Supposed to Stay Mysteries?

By Yossi Ives\* © Chabad 2023

It is well known that some Torah commandments are defined as “rational,” classed as mishpatim, while others are presented as “supra-rational,” called chukim.

Rational laws were issued along with a logical reason or are obvious to any thinking individual. Typical examples are the laws against stealing or murder. Regulations that are regarded as non-rational never come with an explanation, as their reason is known only to the Almighty. The classic example of the latter is the law of the Red Heifer.

One of the great questions of Jewish philosophy is: Should we seek to figure out the reasoning for the non-rational commandments? Is it OK for us to sneak a peek behind the veil that shrouds the commandments and attempt to unravel their mysteries? Maimonides seems to offer mixed messages.

He writes in his great Mishneh Torah legal code:

*“Even though all the chukim of the Torah are decrees ]without any rational explanation[, it is appropriate to meditate upon them and provide a reason wherever possible. The Sages of the early generations said that King Solomon understood most of the rationales for all the statutes of the Torah.1*

Maimonides could not be clearer: The chukim are not essentially illogical; it is only that the reasons have been kept hidden from us. Thus, it is worthy to strive to attribute a reasoning for those commandments.

By contrast, in Eight Chapters (his introduction to *Ethics of the Fathers*), Maimonides appears to state the exact opposite when offering his analysis of the following passage from the Talmud:

*“A person should not say ‘I could not possibly imagine myself committing the sin’; rather, he should say, ‘I could imagine myself committing the sin, but what can I do since my Father in Heaven decreed that I may not.’”*

Maimonides explains that this teaching only applies to chukim, commandments that logic does not compel. Regarding these mitzvot, where there is no obvious moral reason (except for the fact that the Torah forbids it), it is right that a person should state that he restrains himself purely out of fealty to the Almighty.

By contrast, with regard to any commandment that is compelled by logic, in no way should a person say, “I could have done that act,” as to any decent person that those acts are patently immoral, and it is natural for a person to be repulsed by them.

According to Maimonides’ understanding here, then, when it comes to chukim, a person should look to conjecture rational explanations, but should instead view them all as commandments that are complied with purely because that is *what “my Father in Heaven decreed.”*

So, which one is it? Do I treat chukim as non-rational and comply due to Divine fiat, or do I attempt to figure out their proper explanation? How could it be both?

The Rebbe gives two insights that transform our understanding of this issue. What appears to be an irreconcilable contradiction becomes easily resolved.

The first point is that the rational mishpatim laws are so logical that, as the Talmud says, *“if they were never written, they should have by right been written.”*<sup>2</sup> In other words, had the Torah never mandated those laws, we would have created them on our own. They are what is known in philosophy as *“moral imperatives.”* The human mind finds them to be obviously right.

By contrast, chukim are never compelled by logic, even if we can provide a reason that makes sense. Had the Torah not mandated those laws, there is no chance that we would have come up with them ourselves. This is beautifully alluded to by Maimonides himself when he writes, “*Most of the Torah’s laws are nothing other than “counsels given from distance” from “He Who is of great counsel”*<sup>3</sup> to improve one’s character and make one’s conduct upright.”

Chukim will always remain “counsel from afar.” Even if we can secure some understanding of their purpose, they remain something that comes from “afar.” They are the product of a Higher Mind that we may be able to grasp, but are not truly rational notions.

That is why even if chukim can be somewhat understood they are never obviously so. Even if a person strives to understand the chukim, he is still rightly able to say that the main reason for abiding by chukim is because “*my Father in Heaven so decided*,” not because logic demands it.

The second point is that when it comes to mishpatim both the general law and its specifics are rationally explainable. With regards to chukim, however, the details shall forever remain unexplained. For example, even if we may be able to offer a rationally satisfying reasoning for the Biblical concept of impurity *)tum’ah*( – not an easy feat, to say the least – we shall utterly fail to explain the reasons for the vast minutiae.<sup>4</sup>

Maimonides comes very close to saying this in his *Guide for the Perplexed*:

*“All the Commandments have a rational reason at least insofar as the general principle, and they were commanded for a particular purpose, but the details that were set out for the application of the general rule... for these it is impossible to give any reason at all.”*<sup>5</sup>

Maimonides seems to be saying that even when it comes to mishpatim, some details will elude explanation, but with chukim virtually none of the specifics will enjoy a satisfying reason. Thus, even if one were to follow Maimonides’ advice to seek out the reasons for chukim, this is limited only to the main ideas. As for the remainder, we are left saying that this is only due to our obedience to His Will.

So, when it comes to seeking a reason for chukim, we should strive to intellectually grasp whatever we can, as Maimonides says in his Code. But we should also recognize that the reasoning will never be fully compliant with human reason, and we should abandon all attempts to justify the specific sub-laws – as he says in his Eight Chapters.

Here we have the essence of what it is to be a God-fearing person: to the extent possible we shall try to “*know the Law*”<sup>6</sup> – to use our mind to penetrate as deeply as we can into the meaning of every commandment. We do not say, “*As I am willing to comply with all the commandments of faith, why does it matter whether I understand the reasons?*”

We were granted the great gift of intelligence so we may use it to the fullest to understand the Almighty’s teachings. And we were also blessed with the great gift of faith which we use to be able to wholeheartedly embrace that which we cannot understand.

Adapted from *Likkutei Sichot*, vol. 32, Bechukotai II )pg. 174-180(

#### **FOOTNOTES:**

1. End of *Hilchot Temurah*.
2. *Talmud Yoma* 67b.
3. End of *Temurah*, *ibid.*
4. An example of one such attempt by Rabbi Adin Even-Israel *(Steinsaltz)* can be seen [here](#).

5. 3:26.

6. Hosea 2:22.

\* Rabbi of Congregation Ahavas Yisrael, Pomona, N.Y., and founder/Chief Executive of Tag International Development, a charitable organization that focuses on sharing Israeli expertise with developing countries.

[https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article\\_cdo/aid/5115204/jewish/Are-Mysteries-Supposed-to-Stay-Mysteries.htm](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/5115204/jewish/Are-Mysteries-Supposed-to-Stay-Mysteries.htm)

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## **Behar - Bechukotai: When Humility and Pride Coexist**

by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky \*

### **Humility and Pride**

*G-d spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai, saying: )Lev. 25:1(*

We are told that G-d chose to give the Torah on Mount Sinai because it was the lowest -- i.e., humblest -- mountain.

But if G-d meant to teach us humility, He seemingly should have given the Torah in a valley. What is the paradox implied in the lowest of mountains?

Although humility is a necessary component of spiritual life, so is a certain measure of pride. A totally selfless person will feel powerless when he encounters the challenges, doubts, cynicism, and mockery of a world that obscures G-dliness. Hence, we must also be "mountains," mastering the art of asserting ourselves as the representatives of G-d on earth.

It is precisely true self-abnegation that enables us to exhibit true self-assertion: when we have lost all sense of ego, we are no longer aware of ourselves, including our self-abnegation; our consciousness of self has been supplanted by our consciousness of G-d. We are no longer "us"; we are G-d, acting through us.

– From Kehot's Daily Wisdom #3 \*

Gut Shabbos,  
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**Covenant and Conversation**  
**Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l**

**Family Feeling**

I argued in my Covenant and Conversation for parshat Kedoshim that Judaism is more than an ethnicity. It is a call to holiness. In one sense, however, there is an important ethnic dimension to Judaism.

It is best captured in the 1980s joke about an advertising campaign in New York. Throughout the city there were giant posters with the slogan, "You have a friend in the Chase Manhattan Bank." Underneath one, an Israeli had scribbled the words, "But in Bank Leumi you have mishpacha." Jews are, and are conscious of being, a single extended family.

This is particularly evident in this week's parsha. Repeatedly we read of social legislation couched in the language of family:

When you buy or sell to your neighbour, let no one wrong his brother. Lev. 25:14

If your brother becomes impoverished and sells some of his property, his near redeemer is to come to you and redeem what his brother sold. Lev. 25:25

If your brother is impoverished and indebted to you, you must support him; he must live with you like a foreign resident. Do not take interest or profit from him, but fear your God and let your brother live with you. Lev. 25:35-36

If your brother becomes impoverished and is sold to you, do not work him like a slave. Lev. 25:39

"Your brother" in these verses is not meant literally. At times it means "your relative", but mostly it means "your fellow Jew". This is a distinctive way of thinking about society and our obligations to others. Jews are not just citizens of the same nation or adherents of the same faith. We are members of the same extended family. We are – biologically or electively – children of Abraham and Sarah. For the most part, we share the same history. On the festivals we relive the same memories. We were forged in the same crucible of suffering. We are more than friends. We are mishpacha, family.

The concept of family is absolutely fundamental to Judaism. Consider the book of Genesis, the Torah's starting-point. It is not primarily about theology, doctrine, dogma. It is not a polemic against idolatry. It is about families: husbands and wives, parents and children, brothers and sisters.

At key moments in the Torah, God Himself defines His relationship with the Israelites in terms of family. He tells Moses to say to Pharaoh in His name: "My child, My firstborn, Israel" (Ex. 4:22). When Moses wants to explain to the Israelites why they have a duty to be holy, He answers, "You are children of the Lord your God" (Deut. 14:1). If God is our parent, then we are all brothers and sisters. We are related by bonds that go to the very heart of who we are.

The prophets continued the metaphor. There is a lovely passage in Hosea in which the prophet describes God as a parent teaching a young child how to take its first faltering steps: "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My

son ... It was I who taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by the arms ... To them I was like one who lifts a little child to the cheek, and I bent down to feed them." (Hosea 11:1-4).

The same image is continued in rabbinic Judaism. In one of the most famous phrases of prayer, Rabbi Akiva used the words Avinu Malkeinu, "Our Father, our King". That is a precise and deliberate expression. God is indeed our sovereign, our lawgiver and our judge, but before He is any of these things He is our parent and we are His children. That is why we believe divine compassion will always override strict justice.

This concept of Jews as an extended family is powerfully expressed in Maimonides' Laws of Charity:

The entire Jewish people and all those who attach themselves to them are like brothers, as [Deuteronomy 14:1] states: "You are children of the Lord your God." And if a brother will not show mercy to a brother, who will show mercy to them? To whom do the poor of Israel lift up their eyes? To the Gentiles who hate them and pursue them? Their eyes are turned to their brethren alone.[1]

This sense of kinship, fraternity and the family bond, is at the heart of the idea of Kol Yisrael arevin zeh bazein, "All Jews are responsible for one another." Or as Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai put it, "When one Jew is injured, all Jews feel the pain." [2]

Why is Judaism built on this model of the family? Partly to tell us that God did not choose an elite of the righteous or a sect of the likeminded. He chose a family – Abraham and Sarah's descendants – extended through time. The family is the most powerful vehicle of continuity, and the kinds of changes Jews were expected to make to the world could not be achieved in a single generation. Hence the importance of the family as a place of education ("You shall teach these things repeatedly to your children ...") and of handing the story on, especially on Pesach through the Seder service.

Another reason is that family feeling is the most primal and powerful moral bond. The scientist J. B. S. Haldane famously said, when asked whether he would jump into a river and risk his life to save his drowning brother, "No, but I would do so to save two brothers or eight cousins." The point he was making was that we share 50 per cent of our genes with our siblings, and an eighth with our cousins. Taking a risk to save them is a way of ensuring that our genes are passed on to the next generation. This principle, known as "kin selection", is the most basic form of human altruism. It is where the moral sense is born.

That is a key insight, not only of biology but also of political theory. Edmund Burke famously said that "To be attached to the subdivision, to love the little platoon we belong to in society, is the first principle (the germ as it were) of public affections. It is the first link in the series by which we proceed towards a love to our country, and to mankind." [3] Likewise Alexis de Tocqueville said, "As long as family

feeling was kept alive, the opponent of oppression was never alone." [4]

Strong families are essential to free societies. Where families are strong, a sense of altruism exists that can be extended outward, from family to friends to neighbours to community and from there to the nation as a whole.

It was the sense of family that kept Jews linked in a web of mutual obligation despite the fact that they were scattered across the world. Does it still exist? Sometimes the divisions in the Jewish world go so deep, and the insults hurled by one group against another are so brutal that one could almost be persuaded that it does not. In the 1950s Martin Buber expressed the belief that the Jewish people in the traditional sense no longer existed. Knesset Yisrael, the covenantal people as a single entity before God, was no more. The divisions between Jews, religious and secular, orthodox and non-orthodox, Zionist and non-Zionist, had, he thought, fragmented the people beyond hope of repair.

Yet that conclusion is premature for precisely the reason that makes family so elemental a bond. Argue with your friend and tomorrow he may no longer be your friend, but argue with your brother and tomorrow he is still your brother. The book of Genesis is full of sibling rivalries but they do not all end the same way. The story of Cain and Abel ends with Abel dead. The story of Isaac and Ishmael ends with their standing together at Abraham's grave. The story of Esau and Jacob reaches a climax when, after a long separation, they meet, embrace and go their separate ways. The story of Joseph and his brothers begins with animosity but ends with forgiveness and reconciliation. Even the most dysfunctional families can eventually come together.

The Jewish people remains a family, often divided, always argumentative, but bound in a common bond of fate nonetheless. As our parsha reminds us, that person who has fallen is our brother or sister, and ours must be the hand that helps them rise again. [5776]

[1] Mishneh Torah, Laws of Gifts to the Poor, 10:2.  
 [2] Mechilta de-Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai to Ex. 19:6.

[3] Edmund Burke (1729–1797). Reflections on the French Revolution: The Harvard Classics, 1909–14.

[4] Democracy in America, Chapter XVII: Principal causes which tend to maintain the democratic republic in the United States.

**Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin**

"The land must not be sold permanently, because the land is mine and you reside in my land as foreigners and strangers." (Leviticus 25:23)

"You must not defile the Land upon which you live and in the midst of which I (God) dwell,

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since I (God), dwell in the midst of the children of Israel." (Numbers 35:34)

The sacred Zohar teaches that the nation Israel, the Torah, and the Holy One Blessed be He are one. This suggests that the eternal God may be experienced and apprehended through those phenomena which are also perceived to be eternal. Since the covenantal nation Israel is eternal (by Divine oath, Genesis 15) and since the Torah is eternal, Israel, the Torah and God are inextricably linked by virtue of their common eternity.

The land of Israel shares in this feature of eternity. The earth's perennial cycles of birth, growth, decay, death and rebirth, express a movement of re-generation and renaissance which informs the very nature of the most primitive form of life. There are intimations of immortality in the earth's movement from life to life: a fruit falls from the tree when it no longer requires the physical sustenance provided by attachment to the branch, and the tree re-births (regenerates) its fruit in the spring. The trees shed their leaves and fruits onto the earth, and when they decompose and merge with the earth, that very earth provides the necessary nutrients for the tree to continue to grow and bear fruit in the future. Plants leave their seeds in the ground, these continue to sprout plant life from the earth after the mother herb has been taken and eaten. And so the cycle of life, decay, death and rebirth is grounded in the eternal, infinite and natural dimension of the earth. In the words of the wisest of men, "one generation passes away and another generation arrives, but the earth abides forever" (Ecclesiastes 1:3).

In a more national sense, it is the Biblical tradition to bury our dead in the earth, and specifically in the land of Israel. The Biblical idiom for death is, "And he was gathered to his nation, or his family," for if one is buried in one's homeland, one's physical remains merge with the physical remains of one's family members, of those who came and died before as well as of those who will follow in the future.

Furthermore, the land of Israel is invested with a special metaphysical quality which is inextricably linked to Knesset Yisrael, historic Israel. The first Hebrew, Abraham, entered into the Covenant between the Pieces – the Divine mission of a nation founded on the principles of humans created in the image of God and the right of freedom for every individual – in the City of Hebron, and God's promise of world peace and messianic redemption will be realized in the City of Jerusalem. The Cave of the Couples – Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, Jacob and Leah – was the very first acquisition by a Jew of land in Israel as the earthly resting place for the founders of our faith. At the very same time, it is also the womb of our future, a future informed by the ideas and ideals of our revered ancestors. "Grandchildren are the crowning glory of the

aged; parents are the pride of their children". (Proverbs 17: 6)

It is for this reason that the Talmud maintains that only in Israel is there a true and authentic "community" (B.T. Horayot 3) – for only in Israel do we see the footprints of historic Israel, the sweep of the generations, the "common unity" of tradition, from Abraham to the Messiah; Israel formed, prophesied and taught its eternal traditions and continues to live out its destiny within the land of Israel.

Moreover, the eternal Torah is rooted and invested in the very earth, stones and vegetation of the land of Israel. This is true not only in terms of the Biblical covenantal promise which guarantees our constant relationship and eventual return to Israel; it is also true because of the myriad of mitzvot (commandments) embedded in its bedrock, its soil, and its agricultural produce. The seventh Sabbatical year provides free fruits and vegetables for anyone who wishes to take them; the "corners" of the field actually "belong" to the poor every day of the year, and they may come and reap their harvests; tithes from the land's produce immediately go to the Kohen – Priest-teachers, the Levite Cantors, and the poor who share in the land of the rest of the nation. The land of Israel itself cries out to its inhabitants in the name of God: "The land must not be sold permanently, because the land is mine and you reside in my land as foreigners and strangers" (Leviticus 25:23).

Hence God Himself, as it were, becomes inextricably linked – even "incorporated" or "in-corporeal-ized", if you will – within the peoplehood, the land and the Torah of Israel, the very objects and subjects which express God's will and out of which our essence and destiny is formed. Indeed, historic Israel, the land of Israel, the Torah of Israel and the Holy One Blessed be He, God of Israel and the universe are truly united in an eternal bond.

#### **The Person in the Parsha Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb**

##### **Bullying**

It is an old word, and it describes a behavior that has been around since the very beginning of history. Yet the word seems to me to be used more and more frequently these days, and the behavior it describes has gotten out of control.

The word is "bullying," and it refers to a behavior that victimizes others, that abuses them physically, or more typically, verbally. The old adage "sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never harm me" is simply not true. Words do inflict pain upon others and often cause long lasting damage to them. Lately, we have read of more than one suicide which was the result of bullying.

Whenever the media focuses on some supposedly new phenomenon, I am contacted, usually by a reporter, sometimes by a constituent, with the question, "What does

## **Likutei Divrei Torah**

Judaism have to say about this?" During the past few years, as the public has become more concerned about bullying, I have heard that question many times.

The answer is a simple one. Judaism has a lot to say about bullying. One especially relevant source is in the first of this week's double Torah portion, Behar-Bechukotai. "Do not wrong one another..." (Leviticus 25:17) Rashi quotes the Talmud, which states emphatically that this refers to verbal abuse.

Rashi, following the Midrash, provides two interesting examples of how words can be used to abuse another. "One should not," writes Rashi, "tease or taunt another person, and one should not give inappropriate advice to others." The former is an obvious example of bullying, but the latter is a much more subtle example of the damage that words can cause. Misleading a person by giving him advice which does not fit his personal situation is, in the eyes of our Sages, a form of bullying as well.

The Mishnah and Talmud in the tractate Bava Metzia give numerous examples of verbal abuse which all provide insights into the definition of bullying that was adopted by our rabbinic Sages. By analyzing these examples, we learn of some of the forms that verbal abuse takes.

"One must not say to a repentant sinner, 'Remember your former deeds.'" The person who speaks to a repentant sinner this way is guilty of cynicism. He is facing a spiritually motivated individual who sincerely wishes to change. But by confronting him with his past deeds, the penitent becomes discouraged and his idealistic commitment is thereby diminished, if not entirely eliminated.

"One must not say to a sick person that his illness must be a punishment for his misdeeds. He who addresses a sick person in this manner is guilty of both pretentiousness and sanctimony. He dares to presume that he knows the workings of the Divine system of reward and punishment, and, in addition, arrogantly proclaims the message, 'I am holier than thou.'

"One should always be heedful of wronging his wife, for because of her sensitivity she is frequently brought to tears."

How aware our Sages were of the fact that the likeliest targets of bullying are precisely the people who are closest to us. Sensitivity to others must begin with sensitivity to our spouses and family members.

It is apparent just from these examples that our Sages were very familiar with the phenomenon of bullying in all of its diverse forms. They knew that bullying takes many forms, including cynicism, arrogance, condescension and disdain.

They were even aware of the prevalence of abuse within the spousal relationship. This is noteworthy because when I was receiving my graduate education in psychology, the topic of domestic violence was absent from our curriculum. It was much more recently that the gap in my professional education was filled, and the reality of the cruelty which pervades many families became the focus of my clinical work.

In the book of Genesis, there is an example of emotional abuse within the context of a loving relationship. It is so shocking an example that I hesitate to mention it. When the barren Rachel bitterly bemoans her fate to her husband Jacob, he becomes angry with her and says, “Am I in place of God, who has denied you the fruit of the womb?” (Genesis 30:2) The rabbis in the Midrash disclose the Almighty’s reaction to Jacob’s retort: “Is this how one responds to a person in distress?” The Midrash is teaching us that even the patriarch Jacob was once guilty of a callousness that bordered upon emotional abuse and was held accountable for it.

There is a lesson which we all should take to heart whenever we read about flagrant bullying. It is a lesson which must be learned whenever we encounter any prohibition in the Torah. That lesson is that we are all capable of bullying, and in fact, unless we guard against it, may engage in this practice much more often than we realize, and certainly much more frequently than we admit to ourselves. When the Torah tells us, as it does in this week’s parsha, that we are not to wrong another person by abusing him or her verbally, we must not think that this is addressed to some villain or scoundrel. Rather, it is a lesson directed to each and every one of us, and it is a lesson we must learn.

#### **Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand** **Cheating is Forbidden -- Honesty is the Best Policy as Well**

Parshas Behar contains the Torah’s prohibition against cheating: “When you make a sale to your fellow or when you buy from the hand of your fellow, do not victimize one another (Al tonu ish es achiv).” [Vayikra 25:14] Rashi explains that “Al To’nu” refers to deception regarding monetary matters.

It is not a coincidence that this prohibition against cheating immediately follows the section of the Sabbatical year requirements. If there is one lesson that emerges from the parsha of Shemittah, it is that the Ribono shel Olam provides man with his livelihood needs. In the seventh year, farmers (and in Biblical times the economy was almost totally agrarian) were asked to stop working for an entire year, and they were somehow supposed to survive. How can they do that?

The answer is that the Ribono shel Olam promises that He will take care of them. The takeaway lesson of the parsha of Shemittah is

that the Almighty provides our parnassa, and in the seventh year a person can in fact not work, not plant, not harvest, and yet survive – and according to the Torah he will do even more than survive!

If we believed that with all our hearts and souls, we would never be tempted to cheat. Why do we cheat? We cheat so that we can make a couple of extra dollars. However, if we fully internalized the idea that a person’s income is determined by the Almighty each Rosh HaShannah, and whatever we are destined to get will come our way and not a penny more, we would have no reason to cheat and try to deceitfully make those couple of extra dollars! This idea is sometimes very hard for people to accept in practice.

I read a very interesting story about Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky, zt”l. As we have mentioned countless times, Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky exemplified and personified what it means to be an honest person. It is no coincidence that he named his sefer on Chumash Emes L’Yaakov. This is what he preached, and this is what he practiced.

One of Rav Yaakov’s sons was Rav Noson Kamenetsky. Rav Noson wanted to trace his family’s roots and went to visit the little Litvishe European town in which Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky had been the Rav. While he was there, he discovered a very interesting historical fact: Even though much of Lithuanian Jewry was wiped out during the Shoah, to a large extent, the Jews of that particular city survived the war and escaped the Nazi Holocaust.

Rav Noson Kamenetsky went to the mayor of the town and asked him if he could explain how the Jews of this town were successful in saving their lives. The mayor said, “I can tell you exactly why the Jews escaped.” He said that before the war, the fellow who eventually became the mayor was the postmaster of the town. He would have a test for the clergy members of that town – both Jews and non-Jews. The test was that when they would come in to buy postage, he would purposely give them more change than they deserved, and he would see whether they would return the money or not. That was his acid test of what type of people he was dealing with.

He did this three times with Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky. Each time he gave Rav Yaakov more money than he was entitled to in change, Rav Yaakov would always return the money. This postmaster was so impressed with Rav Yaakov, who was the head of the Jewish community, that when years later he was mayor of the town – any time he became aware of a German action which would have wiped out the Jews, he would notify the Jews and they would go hide in the forest or wherever, and that is how the Jews of the city were saved.

## **Likutei Divrei Torah**

When Rav Noson Kamenetsky returned to America from his trip to Europe, he asked his father if he had any recollection of the post office, if he remembered the postmaster, and if he recalled these incidents. Rav Yaakov said that he did not remember the particular story about being tested, but all he remembered was that the postmaster in town did not know how to count.

### **The Strength of the Shomer Shmita**

There is pasuk in Tehillim [103:20] “Bless Hashem, O His angels; the mighty men who do His bidding, to obey the voice of His word.” Basically, Dovid HaMelech invokes a prayer that the people who do the will of G-d should be blessed.

The Medrash comments: Who are these “mighty men” who obey the Word of the Ribono shel Olam? Rav Yitzchak states: The pasuk is speaking about those individuals who observe the laws of the Shemita. Normally a person will do a mitzvah for a day, a week, or a month. But the Sabbatical year continues for an entire twelve-month agricultural cycle, during which you cannot as much as prune your tree! This is a tremendous nisayon (test) and it is ongoing. It is not a passing test that lasts a day or a week. It lasts a year! The farmer sees his field—his entire source of income—lie fallow for a whole year and he keeps quiet! Is there a greater “mighty person” that this?

However, we must ask a question: When the Torah commands the Jewish people to keep Shemita, it says that in the year before the Shemita, they will be blessed with a bounty of a crop, and their fields will yield double their normal produce. So, let us say that the after-expense profit of a farmer is normally \$100,000 per year. In the sixth year of the Shemita cycle he suddenly earns \$200,000. Therefore, he is set for the next two years! What then is the great “strength” alluded to by the pasuk in Tehillim? He is getting his payment “up front”! He has his money in the bank – so where is his nisayon?

Rav Ahaon Kotler explained – someone who asks this question does not understand human nature. If a fellow in the sixth year makes \$200,000, he says to himself, if I could only plant in the seventh year, imagine how much income I would have then! I am not forgoing just \$100,000—perhaps I am forgoing \$200,000 or more! That is the nature of human beings.

This is how life works. Say you bought Apple stock at \$100 a share. Apple then goes up to \$300. You don’t sell. Apple goes up to \$600. You don’t sell. Why don’t you sell? Because Apple is going to go higher. Apple goes up to \$700. “Ahh! You see what a Chochom I am! I did not sell!” Now Apple falls back down to \$400. You see what a shoteh you are! But why didn’t you sell at the peak? It’s because you

always expect to make more money and more money.

That is what this farmer is thinking. Yes, I had a banner crop in the sixth year. I could have done even better in the seventh year! To walk away from that natural aspiration and expectation qualifies one as a Giborei Koach. That takes a strong person!

### Ribis Is Not Just Another Lav

Parshas Behar contains the prohibition of charging another Jew interest. The Medrash records a scary result of engaging in this prohibition: "See how great the punishment is for one who lends with interest: He will not rise up at the time of the Resurrection of the Dead."

Ribis is a lav—a negative commandment—one of 365 such "Thou Shall Not" commandments in the Torah. This is not a lav that is punished by Kares (spiritual excision); it is not a lav that is punished by misah b'dei Shamayim (Death at the Hands of Heaven); it is not a capital offense at all. It is simply a "regular negative commandment." I am not belittling that, but it is just a lav.

Nowhere are we told that for wearing clothes made out of wool and linen (shatnez) that we will not get up at the time of Techiyas HaMeisim. Nowhere are we told that for eating pork (chazir) we will not get up at the time of Techiyas HaMeisim. Why is Ribis so severe that the Medrash warns that for violating this prohibition, a person forfeits his chance for resurrection?

Rav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld once gave an explanation for this: We know that there is a mitzvah called Shiluach HaKen (the prohibition of taking a mother bird together with her chicks from their nest). A person must first send away the mother bird and only then take the eggs. The rationale behind this mitzvah, according to many commentaries, is the following: Normally, a person can never catch a bird. (When I was a little boy, they told me that if you put salt on the tail of a bird, you can catch it. I tried this experiment. In theory it might work, but it is impossible to put salt on the tail of the bird! The bird flies away!)

So, what kind of prohibition is this to not take a mother bird? Mother birds are not catchable! The answer is that in this case, it is possible to catch the mother, because the mother bird does not want to abandon her nest. She is vulnerable when sitting on top of her chicks. The Torah teaches: Do not take advantage of someone's vulnerability, because if not for her mercy on her chicks she would fly the coop—literally and figuratively.

Rav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld explained that it is the same when a person comes to ask to borrow money. Generally speaking, the person needs the money badly. He will do anything to get it. "I need the money. If not, my business

will collapse, the bank will take away my house, my property will be foreclosed. I need the money!" The natural response of a man with capital to such a plea might be, "Okay, I'll lend you the money, but I want 13%!" "Thirteen percent?!?" "Listen, do you want the money or don't you?"

The Torah does not want us to take advantage of vulnerable people. When a person is down and out, the Torah frowns upon taking advantage of his desperation. The prohibition of Ribis is an expression of the Torah's strong displeasure with such behavior. Therefore, the Torah is far stricter by the prohibition of charging interest that it is by other issurim.

### Bechukosai's Blessings Are Conditional; Kohanim's Blessings Are Unconditional

The Rokeach, one of the earlier Chumash commentaries, makes the following observation: The words starting from Bechukosai [Vayikra 26:3] until the words "V'Olech Eschem Komemiyus" [Vayikra 26:13] contain every single letter in the Hebrew alphabet except for the letter Samech. This symbolizes, he says, that all these blessings were given on condition – "If you follow My decrees and observe My commandments and perform them...." The promised blessings will all happen – but only if you keep the Mitzvos. They are all conditional—except for the "Samech Osiyos" (the sixty letters) present in the Birkas Kohanim.

The Priestly Blessings contains exactly sixty letters, and those blessings are guaranteed regardless of our behavior, whether good, bad, or ugly! The Rokeach gives no further elaboration or explanation of this very mysterious formulation. What is the meaning of the Rokeach's terse statement?

I saw the following explanation in the sefer Darash Mordechai: Birkas Kohanim follows the Blessing of Thanksgiving (Modim anachnu Lach) in the morning shemoneh esrei. If a person is already thanking the Almighty and is aware of our debt of gratitude to Him, that alone suffices to raise the person to a level where he deserves blessing. The Blessing that follows our expression of thanksgiving to the Almighty comes without any strings attached.

My good friend, Rav Shragi Neuberger, offered a different interpretation: He suggested that Birkas Kohanim is the legacy of Aharon HaKohen. Aharon HaKohen was the quintessential "lover of peace and pursuer of peace." Aharon HaKohen is so precious and so dear to the Ribono shel Olam that his blessing comes with no strings attached.

I myself had a third thought on the matter: Birkas Kohanim is a very difficult Mitzvah. The Kohanim are commanded to bless the Jewish people out of love (b'Ahavah). The Kohanim need to wish each of their fellow Jews every possible good that they can

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imagine, no matter what their own personal lives are like. It could be that a particular Kohen does NOT have shalom (peace) in his house. It could be that the Kohen does not have parnasa (a good livelihood) in his house. But he must bless his Israelite neighbor that he should have shalom and paransa in his house. It is a blessing that is totally altruistic.

We once mentioned that following the Birkas Kohanim, the Kohanim say a brief prayer including the phrase "we have done what you have DECREED upon us." What kind of DECREE was it to have to bless the Jewish people? The DECREE is that they need to give the full bracha with their full heart, no matter what is going on in their own lives. That is hard. But if the Kohanim are willing to do that, and they do in fact do that, then their Bracha comes with no strings attached. They give it in such a spirit of generosity and altruism that the blessing which flows from such generosity of spirit is a bracha ad bli dai – a blessing without limit or condition.

You are all welcome to ponder this Rokeach and come up with your own interpretations at your Shabbos table.

### Dvar Torah

#### Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

There is hidden power in the word 'if'. Parshat Bechukotai commences, "Im bechukotai teileichu," – "If you walk in my statutes and keep the laws of the Torah," then Hashem will shower us with many blessings.

In the Sefer Belulah VaShemen, written in Verona in the 16th century, a beautiful insight is presented. It identifies three pairs of great Jewish leaders who provide us with inspiration derived from the word 'im', alef (א) and mem (ם), standing for: Aharon and Moshe, Esther and Mordechai, and Eliyahu and Mashiach.

All three are associated with salvation from persecution: Aharon and Moshe led us out of Egypt; Esther and Mordechai lived at a time when Hashem saved us from the intentions of Haman; and our world will see an end to all trouble and warfare in the time of Eliyahu and the Mashiach. But the Sefer Belulah VaShemen makes a further point. These three pairs are also associated with our connection to a life filled with commitment to Torah values.

The exodus from Egypt took us to Mount Sinai where we embraced a life full of Torah study and observance. During the time of Esther and Mordechai, the Jewish people said, "Kiymu v'kiblu," accepting upon themselves a life of dedication to shmirat mitzvot, the keeping of the precepts of the Torah, and similarly the coming of the Mashiach is associated with our dedication to everything that is good and of value in this world.

The word 'im' therefore highlights for us that the value of being Jewish does not merely mean to be physically alive, but far beyond that: to have meaning in our lives, to bring joy to our existence, to radiate the light of Hashem to the world around us, thanks to the inspiration we derive from the Torah.

Thanks to Aharon and Moshe that is what we experienced after the exodus. Thanks to Esther and Mordechai, that is what we experienced in the days of Haman and Achashveirosh. And 'im' – if – in addition to being physically alive, we also lead virtuous lives, may we experience a time when Eliyahu the Prophet will herald the coming of the Mashiach, may it happen speedily in our time.

### **Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel Encyclopedia of Jewish Values\***

#### **How Jews View Non-Jews**

In this week's Parsha, the Torah speaks about a Jew who is so poor, he is sold to a non-Jew living in Israel as a slave. The Torah declares an obligation to try to "buy this Jew out," i.e., pay his debt that so that the Jew does not remain a slave to a non-Jew (Leviticus 25:47-49). This brings up the issue of how Jews relate to and view non-Jews. In the past, we wrote about Jews in a minority living in a non-Jewish society, with the obligation to remain different (Parshat Vayechi, 5782). But the Torah in our Parsha is speaking about when non-Jews are in the minority. How do the Torah and traditional Judaism generally view the non-Jew? While stereotypes developed when Jews lived in non-Jewish lands for two thousand years ("Shikker-drunk as a Goy-non-Jew"), does the rather negative perception of non-Jews by Jews reflect Jewish law and normative Jewish values of not? We will see some very interesting viewpoints in the sources.

**Creating Positive Ties** - While the Jews had to remain different and separate from non-Jews (to prevent assimilation and intermarriage, among other reasons), the Rabbis realized that without peaceful coexistence between the Jewish and non-Jewish communities, life would be difficult for everyone involved. Therefore, already at the time of the Mishna, it was mandated that Jews should greet all non-Jews, by saying "hello" and creating positive social interaction (Mishna, Shevi'it 4:3). The Talmud (Gittin 61a) also says that the Jewish community should reach out to the non-Jewish community regarding certain communal activities. Thus, Jews should visit the sick of non-Jews, even idol worshippers, bury their dead (in a separate area, of course), and help the poor of non-Jews. Maimonides (Maimonides, Hilchot Avodat Kochavim 10:5) codifies this as Jewish law.

There is an additional Mitzvah, ever-present for the Jew, to sanctify God's name (Maimonides, Hilchot Yesodai HaTorah 5:1). This directs a Jew's behavior, even before non-

Jews (as well as Jews), to behave in a manner that people will praise God's name and think better of the Jewish God. There is a story in the Jerusalem Talmud (Jerusalem Talmud, Bava Metzia 8a), where a Jew did a good deed for a non-Jew, and then the non-Jew praised the Jewish God of the person who performed this act of kindness. Beyond the concept of sanctifying God's name, there is a general concept regarding non-Jews that Jews should be a "light unto the nations. (Isaiah 49:6)" This implies that Jews should be "role models" for non-Jews to (eventually) emulate. All these considerations are present in dealing with the non-Jewish surrounding community (which will be amplified even more at the end of this chapter).

Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik (Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, Shavuot address to students, 1982) amplified this concept when he explained that the Torah was purposely given publicly, before the entire world, so that the non-Jews of the world would be aware of its content and know what Judaism stood for. In reality, the Torah should have been given privately (Rashi commentary on Exodus 34:3) and the reason the Tablets were later inevitably shattered was because it was given publicly (see the chapter about "Modesty-More than Dress" for an expansion of this theme). Nevertheless, although He knew the Tablets were to be broken, God understood that the public nature of the Torah giving was necessary and essential for the benefit of the world's non-Jews. According to Rabbi Soloveitchik, before the giving of the Ten Commandments, the Torah intentionally told two stories (Amalek and Yitro) involving non-Jews and their interaction with Jews, even though one story was chronologically out of place. The reaction of these two non-Jews became the paradigm for all non-Jewish reactions to Jews over the centuries. While Amalek saw the Jewish experiences and tried to destroy the Jewish people, Yitro witnessed the same experience and joined the Jewish people. Thus, this interaction with non-Jews is crucial for Jewish existence, and a precondition to giving the Torah by God. Through continued interaction, the non-Jews of the world will eventually embrace Judaism of their own accord. As the Talmud says, eventually, the truth is recognized by all (Sotah 9b).

The tension between interaction and distance continues even today, when more non-Jews welcome Jews into their society than ever before, and yet antisemitism is on the rise. Each society and each community must determine for itself the proper balance, maintaining distance yet creating a relationship. There is no tried and true formula, especially after the lessons of the Holocaust. The Jewish community must be cautious, yet open. It is up to the Jewish leadership to set up the proper structure and "ground rules". It also should always be remembered that some non-Jews will always be Amalek while others will be Yitro.

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**Judaism Cares About the Non-Jews of the World** - The sensitivity of Judaism to non-Jews is not due to any desire to proselytize non-Jews since active proselytization is forbidden in Judaism. And yet, numerous sources and Jewish laws indicate the caring attitude that Judaism demonstrates for all non-Jews in general. For example, the special prayer of praise recited on every Festival by Jews is called Hallel. On every festival, all the numerous paragraphs (from the Psalms) are chanted. However, on the last six days of Passover, two paragraphs are omitted and only "Half Hallel" is recited (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 490:4). Why are these paragraphs of praise omitted? The Talmud answers that since the Egyptians drowned at the end of the original Passover, it would be inappropriate to sing the praise of God. However, these were the Egyptians who murdered and tortured thousands of Jews, who kept Jews enslaved with back-breaking work for 210 years!! Nevertheless, says God, every human being, every non-Jew is His creation, and it is proper to be sad when human life is lost, even that of an enemy (Megillah 10b). This is also why Jews remove 10 symbolic drops of wine at the Passover Seder, to deny a full cup of joy, as many Egyptians suffered through the Ten Plagues. Since non-Jews are creations of God, they also have within them a Divine Image unique to every human being (Genesis 1:27).

On the holiday of Sukkot, there were many sacrifices brought to the Temple of Jerusalem. The Torah tells the Jews to bring 70 sacrifices in all (Numbers 29:12-36), and the Talmud explains (Sukkah 55b) that the purpose of these sacrifices was to bring atonement for the sins of all the non-Jews in the world, not for the Jews. Thus, the Jewish Temple was used to help non-Jews of the world. The Talmud also records (Sukkah 55b) that a non-Jew who learns the Torah is equated in greatness with that of the High Priest.

**Jews Should Learn from Non-Jews** - The Jewish people make no claim of exclusivity on intelligence. An intelligent non-Jew is called a scholar (Megillah 16a), the same term used for a Jewish scholar. If a non-Jew imparts wisdom or discovers something new, the Jew should accept, praise, and believe in that wisdom (Berachot 58a). Thus, all scientific, medical, mathematical, and otherworldly knowledge developed by non-Jews is to be embraced by the Jewish world and admired. Similarly, a non-Jew who has attained great political power is to be appreciated by Jews and even blessed (Berachot 58a) as is the wise non-Jew (Berachot 58a), since every non-Jewish achievement also honors God, the Creator of all human beings. This is not merely a nice idea expressed in the Talmud, but it is part of Jewish law - to recite a specific blessing when seeing either a wise non-Jew or a non-Jewish king (Berachot 58a).

When the Talmud asks (Kiddushin 31a) what the most outstanding example is of honoring one's parents, it cites the story of a non-Jewish son, Dama, the son of Netina, who possessed very precious stones needed for the Breastplate worn by the Priest in the Temple. The Rabbis offered him 600,000 Dinars, but the son refused to sell because the key to the stones was beneath the pillow of his sleeping father, whom he would not wake, no matter how important the reason. The following year, God rewarded Dama's great respect for his father by providing in his flock the rare Red Heifer which garnered him a huge sum.

The Non-Jew is Looked Upon as Equal to the Jew in Rights & Dignity - Rabbi Ahron Soloveitchik (Rabbi Ahron Soloveitchik, "Logic of the Heart, Logic of the Mind, pp. 61-92, Genesis Jerusalem Press, 1991) demonstrates through the sources that Judaism demands that all human beings are to be treated with equal respect and dignity. For example, in the Mishna, Ethics of the Fathers (Mishna Avot 3:14), Rabbi Akiva stated that man is beloved by God because the human being was created in the image of God. It does not say that the Jewish people are beloved by God, as we might have expected (and this is also true, as discussed below), but rather "man" i.e., all human beings. The commentary Tosafot Yom Tov explicitly says this teaching refers to both Jews and non-Jews (Tosafot Yom Tov commentary to Mishna Avot 3:14). This is because the original man, Adam, who was not "Jewish" per se, was created with that divine image, that spark of God within each human being (Genesis 4:5). In fact, there is a textual dispute if the Mishna about the worth of each human being refers only to Jews or not. The Mishna states (Mishna Sanhedrin 4:5) that each human being has infinite value, equal to that of the entire world. The proof the Mishna itself brings is that only one human being was created during the creation of the entire world. Since all human beings have this uniqueness as the first human being (and not only Jews), it is illogical to claim that this Mishna refers only to Jews, but, rather, must refer to every human. Thus, every non-Jew, who possesses that divine spark, must be given equal rights and dignity as Jews.

In the same vein, the Mishna states that a Jew should not despise any man (Mishna Avot 4:3). It does not say "do not despise any Jew" but "any man" since it is forbidden for a Jew to despise non-Jew as well (for no legitimate reason), and non-Jews are included in this teaching. Rashi, who lived in an overwhelmingly Christian society, comments on the Torah verse commanding Jews not to ascend the altar of the Temple with steps, but, rather, via a ramp. Following the traditional explanation for this law, Rashi says (Exodus 20:23, with Rashi commentary) that it would be embarrassing for a Jew (who commonly wore robes as clothing at that time) to expose parts of his body by ascending stairs in a robe. But who would see this exposed body? Only

the stones of the Temple, beneath that person. Then Rashi adds how much more logical is it to extend this concept. If the Torah is worried about man's dignity in disrespecting the stones, how much more so must all Jews be aware not to disrespect any human being created by God, or treat him or her disgracefully, including, of course, all non-Jews? Another verse commands Jews to pursue justice or righteousness (depending on the translation). The actual words are "Justice Justice you shall pursue." The word "Justice" in the verse is repeated. Some commentaries explain the repetition is for emphasis, but Rabbeinu Bechaye explains that the first "Justice" refers to the treatment of Jews, while the second "justice" refers to the treatment of non-Jews (Deuteronomy 16:20, with commentary of Kad Hakemach, "Midrashot" section).

\* 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](mailto:nachum@jewishdestiny.com)

#### Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

##### Give it a Break

##### Rabbi Yedidya (Julian) Sinclair

In the first of this week's parshiyot, Behar, the Torah lays out elements of an ideal economic order. Central to this vision is the shmita, or sabbatical year.

When you enter into the land that I assign you, the land shall observe 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. You shall not reap the aftergrowth of your harvest or gather the grapes of your untrimmed vines. It shall be a year of complete rest for the land, but you may eat whatever the land will produce during its Sabbath—you, your male and female slaves, the hired and bound laborers who live with you, and your cattle and the beasts on your land may eat all its yield. (Lev. 25:2-7)

The Torah commands us to cease agricultural work in the seventh year. Just as people enjoy Sabbath one day out of seven, so, too, should the land have its Sabbath, one year out of seven. This is our duty of stewardship to the earth. We should not treat it as merely a resource to be endlessly exploited for our benefit; the land must also rest. During the land's Sabbath, we do not plant or cultivate it, and we eat only what grows by itself. Thus, we show that we are not the land's ultimate masters. In this year, land is a place where humans, animals, and the earth itself meet on equal terms; there are no owners or exploiters but only fellow creatures.

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The vision of Behar is complemented by passages in Parshat Mishpatim, where shmita is a periodic economic levelling, when fields are made ownerless and all who wish to can enter and eat. Parshat Re'eh adds that shmita year is a time of universal debt forgiveness. Taken altogether, the Torah's template for shmita is very radical; it legislates a septennial time-out in Jewish economic life, a year of spiritual renewal, a holiday for the land, a yearlong cease-fire in the economic struggle of all against all, and a periodic abolition of many of the rights of private property.

So it is not surprising that the history of these commandments has been marked by conflict between their exacting requirements and the demands of economic reality. The remission of debts (shmitat kesafim), though technically binding inside and outside Israel, became largely moot from the first century bce. Hillel the Elder saw that people were doing exactly what the Torah had warned them not to do: they were withholding loans in the run-up to the shmita year. The poor suffered most from people's reluctance to lend them money, an unintended consequence of a law that was meant to help them. So Hillel instituted the famous prozbul enactment, which handed over the responsibility for outstanding debts to the courts, which, as a public authority, were allowed to collect debts. Thus, observance of shmitat kesafim may be avoided.

In modern times, the famous heter mekhira controversy has been the main modern arena for this clash between the demands of shmita and the exigencies of economic life. With the advent of the shmita of 1888-89, it was clear to many of the recent pioneering immigrants to Eretz Yisrael, that observing the sabbatical year as commanded in the Bible would be economically ruinous and would likely lead to the extinction of the nascent agricultural settlements. For a solution, the neophyte farmers appealed to European rabbis, including Rabbi Shmuel Mohliver, who ruled that they might continue to work the land in the sabbatical year, provided that the land was sold to non-Jews for the duration of the shmita. This leniency was patterned after the permission to sell hametz, leavened food, to non-Jews during Passover in order to avoid serious financial loss. In 1909, Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook's close identification with the pioneers led him to strongly endorse the heter mekhira. His great work, "Shabbat Ha'aretz," placed the heter on a firm halakhic footing and ensured that this would be the main way in which shmita would be observed – or not observed – in Israel up to our time.

Yet for Rav Kook, this solution was always meant to be temporary and provisional. He longed for the day when the Jewish life in Israel would be firmly established enough for shmita to be observed in its fullness. Rav Kook prefaced Shabbat Ha'aretz with a lyrical introduction in which he paints a social-spiritual vision of the ideal shmita:

"What Sabbath does for the individual, shmita does for the nation as a whole. The Jewish people, in whom the godly, creative force is planted eternally and distinctively, has a special need to periodically reveal the divine light within itself with full intensity. Our mundane lives, with their toil, anxiety, anger, and competition do not entirely suffocate this creative force. On the shmita, our pure, inner spirit may be revealed as it truly is. The forcefulness that is inevitably part of our regular, public lives lessens our moral refinement. There is always a tension between the ideal of listening to the voice inside us that calls us to be kind, truthful, and merciful, and the conflict, compulsion, and pressure to be unyielding that surround buying, selling, and acquiring things... Stilling the tumult of social life from time to time in certain predictable ways is meant to move this nation, when it is well-ordered, to rise toward an encounter with the heights of its other, inner moral and spiritual life."

Meaningful observance of shmita, in a way that would give expression to such a vision, is one of the great unmet spiritual challenges of the renewal of Jewish life in Israel. The questions about what this would even mean in a modern economy are endlessly complex. May the coming shmita year beginning this Rosh Hashanah bring us a little closer to understanding and responding to the challenge.

#### Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

##### Rabbi Daniel Stein

##### The Yoke of Yichus

In the midst of the tochacha in Parshas Bechukosai there seems to be a lone pasuk of consolation, "Then will I remember My covenant with Yakov, I will remember also My covenant with Yitzchak, and also My covenant with Avraham, and I will remember the land" (Vayikra 26:42). Juxtaposing a pasuk of consolation in between the curses of the tochacha is not only thematically curious, it is also unprecedented and unique, because in the tochacha of Parshas Ki Savo there does not appear to be a corresponding verse of consolation. This prompts the Shelah Hakadosh to claim that even this pasuk of consolation is in fact part of the litany of castigations. He explains that the guilt of Bnei Yisrael is only deepened by their zechus avos and illustrious yichus. The very fact that they failed to learn from the example of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, and to build upon the spiritual foundation that they inherited, further underscores their profound negligence and culpability.

For this reason, the Torah omits the name of Yaakov when tracing the lineage of Korach, as the pasuk states, "Korach the son of Yitzhar, the son of Kehas, the son of Levi (Bamidbar 16:1). Rashi comments, "it does not, however, make mention of Levi being the son of Yaakov, because as an act of mercy Yaakov asked that his name should not be mentioned in

connection with their quarrels." How was Yaakov's request to withhold his name from Korach's roster of relatives considered an act of mercy? It seems that it would have been more merciful for Yaakov to petition that his name and merits be included together with Korah in order to protect him from punishment. The Radomsker Rebbe (Tiferes Shlomo, Derush for Rosh Hashanah) resolves, that any association with Yaakov would have only compounded Korach's iniquity because when a person hails from a prominent family adorned with role model the likes of Yaakov, and nevertheless acts inappropriately, the punishment he deserves is far more severe.

In this vein, the Torah states, "and they shall confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their fathers" (Vayikra 26:40). Why would the Jewish people include their fathers in the confession of their own personal sins? Rav Yosef Karo (Toldos Yitzchak) suggests that this reflects our tendency to excuse our own shortcomings by shifting the blame to our parents, which is precisely why this form of viduy was rejected and considered disingenuous. However, the traditional nusach of viduy actually begins, "but we, and our forefathers, have sinned," which implies that it is indeed appropriate to incorporate our parents into our own personal confession. But how do we have the audacity to pass judgement on our parents and to ask for forgiveness on their behalf? Perhaps the viduy is not discussing the individual actions of our parents but rather the notion that our sins implicate them as well and are potentially a betrayal of their lessons and legacy. The generational disappointment of righteous forefathers magnifies the sins of their progeny and therefore is rightly integrated into the process and language of viduy.

Many meforshim compare yichus to the number zero because yichus alone is inherently worthless. However, just like when a positive number precedes a zero its value is increased exponentially, and when a negative number is followed by a zero its value is diminished even further, so too, when a person keeps the Torah and the mitzvos in the footsteps of his ancestors his actions are enhanced by their legacy, at the same time, when he stumbles and falls, the family name comes crashing down on top of him. Therefore, it is incumbent upon every Jew to consider not only their own actions, but to appreciate the responsibility that they have to the past and the yoke of yichus.

The Yalkut Shimoni (Bamidbar 684) relates that at the time of Kabbalas HaTorah the other nations of world complained to Hashem that He was showing favoritism to the Jewish people. Hashem replied that the Jews were uniquely qualified to receive the Torah because they alone possess a sefer yuchsin - a list of their ancestors. How was this response satisfactory? Why is nepotism preferable and more palatable than favoritism? Perhaps the importance of the sefer yuchsin was not represented by the names that it contained by

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rather by its very existence in the first place. Only the Jewish people were able to produce a sefer yuchsin for they alone cherished the memory of their ancestors while the other nations of the world were busy discarding and decrying them. Since the Torah is a "heritage" (Devarim 33:4), and not an inheritance, Hashem could only trust that the Torah would be preserved intact for the next generation by the Jewish people because they alone have a fidelity to the past.

Amongst the blessings in Parshas Bechukosai, the pasuk states, "You will eat very old produce" (Vayikra 26:10). How is it a blessing to eat very old food, isn't fresh food better? One of my talmidim who worked in the food service industry once humorously suggested, that since catered food is usually not too fresh, maybe the nature of the blessing is to have an abundance of catered food. However, Rav Dov Weinberger (Shemen Hatov) proposes that the blessing refers to having an appreciation for the past and deriving enjoyment from that which is old, instead of constantly lustng after that which is new and more modern. Indeed, only if we understand our responsibility to the past, and embrace the yoke of yichus, can we be faithful stewards of the Torah and successfully pass on our tradition to the next generation.

#### Torah.Org Dvar Torah

##### by Rabbi Label Lam

##### Well Worth the Effort

If you will go in My decrees and keep My Mitzvos and perform them; then I will provide rains in their time, and the land will give its produce and the tree of the field will give its fruit. (Vayikra 26:3)

If you will go in My decrees...If you follow My decrees by engaging in intensive Torah study, with the intention that such study will lead you to observe ... (Rashi: Sifri)

How is going in HASHEM's decrees equated with toiling in Torah study. How does the idea of going translate into "engaging in intense Torah"?

The Torah is dense with life lessons and directives from HASHEM. Here are a few rules to decoding those holy messages. Firstly, every word in Torah has daily relevance for everyone one of us. Secondly, if the same word is used in two different places in the Torah, there is a connection. It may not be obvious but there is a relationship between the two subjects. Thirdly, the Sefas Emes points out that just as there are positive or action Mitzvos, things to do, and there are "negative" Mitzvos, requirements to refrain, and not do, so many Mitzvos have a companion. "Pursue justice" is paired with "distance yourself from a lie. In one case we are meant to avoid falsehood and at the same time to chase after truth. They work together, as King Dovid writes, "Turn from bad and do good...".

Armed with this info let us look at the opening words of Parsha B'Chukosai, “Im b’chukosai telechu...If you will go in my decrees...”. The word “telechu” – going” is employed at the very end of Parshas Acharei Mos. We are cautioned, “B’Chukosehem lo telechu”- “Do not go in the way of their statutes” (the ways of the nation).

Now we have a companion to “Im b’chukosai telechu” – if you will go in My decrees” and “B’Chukosehem lo telechu”- “Do not go in the way of their statutes”. How does one effectively live amongst a foreign culture and yet remain separate? It’s a very great challenge and it has been the secret of our survival now for many thousands of years, to remain distinct. Practically, how is it done?

The answer is as simple as riding a bike. A colleague told me recently that there are three things you learn from riding a bike. 1) If it’s hard, you are going up hill. 2) If it’s easy, you are going down. 3) If you are standing still, you lose your balance.

The Maharal says that the “going”, literally walking, requires continuous effort. It’s not like driving a car. One must continually exert himself to move from station to station. Standing still is not an option when avoiding being seduced by the surrounding culture. One must have a strong drive, a clear vision of what they want to make out of themselves and continually strive to achieve that goal. There must be a healthy tension between the “is” and the “ought”, like one who is walking or riding a bike on a slight incline.

There was a fisherman who had a sign advertising, “Fresh Fish”. A skeptic challenged him, “How do you know that you are selling fresh fish? When fish die, they float on the water. Maybe the fish you captured in your net were dead and they are not fresh!” The fisherman guaranteed that his fish were fresh.

The skeptic asked him, “How can you guarantee that?” The fisherman answered, “I sweep my net downstream. I am catching fish that are swimming upstream, and if a fish is swimming upstream then, it’s alive!” Like Avraham Avinu, a live Jew has to swim against current trends and do what’s right.

At a Yeshiva reunion, years back, someone said to me, “Decades have passed, Reb Label, and you are exactly the same.” I took it as a complement and I told him, “You don’t know how much work it has taken just to remain the same.

HASHEM implores us if you will just go in MY statutes and not the ways of the nations, it will take a clarity of purpose and it may be hard but it will be well worth the effort.

# Weekly Internet Parsha Sheet

## Behar Bechukosai 5783

[CS – added items that just came through.]

from: TorahWeb <torahweb@torahweb.org> via

gmail.mcsv.net

date: May 11, 2023, 8:23 PM

subject: Rabbi Mordechai Willig - Unbounded Sanctity

### Rabbi Mordechai Willig

#### Unbounded Sanctity

I I will place My sanctuary among you... I will walk among you (Vayikra 26:11,12)

The Seforno explains this to mean: My presence will dwell among you wherever you are, as it was destined before the [sin of the golden] calf, as He said (Shemos 20:21), "Wherever I mention My name I will come to you and bless you". The Seforno renders "wherever I mention My Name" to refer to the houses of Hashem, such as a beis hamedrash where Torah is learned (see Oz Vehadar edition footnote 39). Hashem is saying as follows: I will not be limited to one place only, as it was in the Mishkan and in the Mikdash (as it says in Shemos 25:8, "They shall make a sanctuary for Me so that I may dwell among them"), rather, I will walk among you and My glory will be seen wherever you are. My holy upper presence (Tehillim 46:5) is wherever the righteous of the generation will be.

Elsewhere (Shemos 25:9; 31:18) the Seforno explains that the Mishkan was necessitated by the sin of the golden calf; ideally, there is no need for the Mishkan because Hashem's presence is everywhere, as the beracha in Parshas Bechukosai states. Nevertheless, even in the ideal eschaton, there will be a third Beis Hamikdash, but for a surprising reason: "the nations shall know that I am Hashem Who sanctifies Am Yisrael, as My Mikdash will be among them forever" (Yechezkel 37:28). The Malbim explains this to mean that Hashem's presence will Divine Presence will dwell upon all of Am Yisrael so much so that they themselves will not need the sanctity of the Mikdash. The Mikdash will exist only so that the nations will know that Hashem sanctifies Am Yisrael.

II "May it be Your will, Hashem, that Your city will be built speedily in our days, and give us our portion in Your Torah" (Avos 5:30). The more familiar version of this statement, recited after Shemoneh Esrei, substitutes "The Beis Hamikdash" in place of "Your city". The juxtaposition of the tefilla for the Beis Hamikdash and the tefilla for our portion in Your Torah requires explanation.

Rav Chaim Ya'akov Goldvicht (Asufas Ma'arachos, Shavuot p.154) refers to the very beginning of Parshas Bechukosai, which states the prerequisite for the ensuing berachos: "If you will follow My decrees" (26:3). Rashi explains this to mean, "that you will toil in the [study of] Torah". Only by immersion in Torah study can one earn the beracha of the Divine Presence dwelling within him. Moreover, as Tosafos (Bava Basra 21a) cites from the Sifri,

the very purpose of going up to Yerushalayim is to learn to fear Hashem always (Devarim 14:23). When one would see the great sanctity and the kohanim doing the avoda, he would serve Hashem better and learn Torah. While staying in Yerushalayim to consume his ma'aser sheni, he would see everyone serving Hashem and he, too, would focus on fear of Hashem and learn Torah.

When we pray for the rebuilding of the Beis Hamikdash, we immediately add, "and give us our portion in Your Torah", since this is the ultimate purpose of the Beis Hamikdash. Rav Goldvicht cites the Gemara (Berachos 58a) which states: eternity (netzach) refers to Yerushalayim and glory (hod) refers to the Beis Hamikdash. The sanctity of Yerushalayim flows from the power of Torah. The sanctity of the Torah flows from the inner Divine Presence ("I will build a Mishkan in my heart") which is eternal, and thus eternity refers to Yerushalayim. The sanctity of the Mikdash, by contrast, is only the outer revelation of our inner sanctity. We pray that Hashem appear, and reveal His glory upon us in the eyes of all living (Musaf on Yom Tov), as the Malbim explains. The glory of the Beis Hamikdash is not eternal, as we no longer have it. When we pray for its return, we hasten to add a prayer for our share in the eternal Torah.

III Next Friday is Yom Yerushalayim, 28 Iyar. I was privileged to be a student of Rav Goldvicht in Kerem B'Yavne when Yerushalayim was reunited on that day in 1967. One week later, on Shavuos, the Old City and the Kosel Hama'ravi were opened to the public. The talmidim of Kerem B'Yavne who were not in the Army held a mishmar in Heichal Shlomo and marched, and danced, to the Kosel for Musaf. The unforgettable experience culminated with the partially fulfilled prayer, "bring us to Tziyon Your city with joy and to Yerushalayim with eternal happiness." Only "Your Beis Hamikdash" was missing. The euphoria of the event, and the miraculous turnaround from open threats of annihilation to a stunning military victory in six days, preoccupied all of us. We were taken to Kever Rachel and Me'aras Hamachpela, sites we had never expected to see in our lifetime just weeks earlier. A lavish se'udas hoda'ah was held in the Yeshiva. It was then that Rav Goldvicht cautioned us to have a proper perspective. Surely there is an obligation to thank Hashem for the miracles, and to be inspired by our newfound closeness to the site of the Beis Hamikdash. However, as our daily tefilla states, and as the Seforno and the Malbim explain, studying Torah is an even higher level. It is an internal and eternal sanctity, our share in Hashem's Torah. The Rosh Yeshiva quoted the Gemara (Makkos 10a): one day in Your courtyards is better than a thousand (Tehillim 84:11). Hashem said [to David Hamelech]: one day that you learn Torah before me is better than a thousand

offerings that your son Shlomo will sacrifice before Me on the mizbeach. This demonstrates that Torah learning is a higher value than the Avoda in the Beis Hamikdash. The heady days of June 1967 are but a memory, however glorious and unforgettable. The city and land of Hashem, reunited and liberated, suffer from terror and divisiveness which did not exist back then. The glory is not eternal. This week's parsha begins with toiling in Torah, and its berachos culminate in the personal sanctity of Torah, which is not bounded by time or place. This week's perek in Pirkei Avos adds the prayer for our share in Torah to the prayer for the rebuilding of the Beis Hamikdash. As we celebrate Yom Yerushalayim and Shavuos, may we merit the speedy fulfillment of both these prayers.

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from: **Rabbi Yissocher Frand** <ryfrand@torah.org>  
to: ravfrand@torah.org  
date: May 11, 2023, 7:12 PM  
subject: Rav Frand - The "Chok" Aspect of Diligent Torah Study  
Parshas Bechukosai

#### The "Chok" Aspect of Diligent Torah Study

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrushah Tapes on the weekly portion: #1204 – **The Friend Who Reneged on their Power Ball Agreement. Good Shabbos!**

The pasuk at the beginning of Parshas Bechukosai says: "If you walk in My statutes and keep My commandments, and do them" (Vayikra 26:3). Rashi explains that "Im b'chukosai teilechu" (If you walk in my statutes) cannot be referring to Mitzvah observance in general because that is mentioned elsewhere in this pasuk. Rashi says that the expression means "she'ti'heyu ameilim b'Torah" (that you should be diligent in your study of Torah).

This seems to be a very strange drasha. The word chok and the phrase "ameilus b'Torah" do not seem to be related. Chukim are those mitzvos which, at first glance, seem to have no rhyme or reason. Shatnez is a chok. Why can't a garment contain wool and linen together? The Ribono shel Olam knows. He has His reasons. We accept that. The ultimate chok, the paradigm of all chukim, is Parah Adumah (the Red Heifer). There is no sense to this law—at least to us human beings. The prohibition of eating pig is a chok. The laws of Kashrus are chukim. On the other hand, ameilus b'Torah is diligently pursuing the understanding of Torah. It is an intellectual pursuit requiring intense mental effort. Learning and understanding Torah is not a chok. Why do Chazal and Rashi define b'chukosai teileichu as ameilus b'Torah?

Rav Simcha Zissel gives the following answer in his sefer on Chumash: When the Torah refers to ameilus b'Torah being a chok, it is referring to the transformative properties of Torah. Learning Torah does something to a person. Torah learned properly changes the person. He becomes a different person. There is no other academic discipline that

has this property. If a person is "amel in Physics" or "amel in Economics," it does not change the nature of the person. Even if someone is an "amel in Philosophy," it still does not affect his nature. To wit, there were great philosophers, who, on a personal level, left much to be desired.

When Chazal say that "you should be ameilim b'Torah" here, they are referring to this mystical power of Torah to change people. The pasuk is referring to that "chok." If that is the case, then merely quickly "learning up" a blatt Gemara or merely being ma'aver sedra and reading the Targum without knowing what you are saying is a fulfillment of the Biblical Mitzvah of learning Torah—I am not denying that—but the power of Torah to transform the person requires a different level of learning. That is amelus b'Torah. That is shvitzing over a Daf of Gemara. That is sweating hard to understand a Tosfos.

That is why, for instance, Rav Chaim of Volozhin writes in his sefer Safre De'tzneusa, as follows: "I heard from the mouth of the holy Gaon of Vilna that many times malachim (angels) came to his doorway to offer to freely transmit to him the secrets of Torah, without any effort or intensive study on his part at all. However, he refused to listen to them." The Gaon said "no thanks" to these malachim who were anxious to share Torah secrets with him without his having to expend any effort to acquire this knowledge.

If a malach came to me one night and wanted to share "Torah secrets" with me, I would tell him "Be my guest!" But the Gaon, who was the personification of a Torah genius, wanted to have the ameilus b'Torah. He refused to accept a "free pass" to the acquisition of Torah knowledge. That is what makes a person different.

The Taz says in Shulchan Aruch that the bracha we recite every morning before learning Torah is "... asher kidishanu b'mitzvosav v'tzivanu LA'ASOK b'Divrei Torah." La'asok means to be diligently involved or engrossed. The more common language would be "LILMOD (to learn) Torah." The Taz explains the connotation of the word La'Asok. Chazal really want us to put effort—blood, sweat, and tears—into our Torah study endeavors. Only then will the Torah student experience the mystical power of Torah to transform him. This is the interpretation of Im b'chukosai teleichu – she'ti'heyu AMEILIM b'Torah.

#### The Message of Shmitta For Contemporary Society

After spelling out the rewards that come in the wake of "If you will walk in the ways of my statutes..." (Vayikra 26:3), the Torah begins the Tochacha itself with the words "And if you will not hearken unto Me..." (Vayikra 26:14). The Torah lists terrible curses that will befall Klal Yisrael if they do not keep the Torah's commandments. And then the pasuk says, "Then the land will finally have its Sabbaticals." (Vayikra 26:34).

It seems from this pasuk that the Tochacha occurs because the Jews did not observe Shmitta (the Sabbatical year).

Since the land was not allowed to lie fallow for the entire year as intended, the Jews will be exiled from their country and the land will finally lie fallow for many years, as a compensation.

Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky asks a simple question: Who mentioned Shmitta anywhere in this parsha? Shmitta is not specifically mentioned in Parshas Bechukosai – neither in any of the listed mitzvos that we are supposed to keep, nor in any of the listed aveiros that we should avoid transgressing. Suddenly, when commenting on the after-effect of the punishment (exile), the Torah comments “Then the land will have its Shmitta.” This seems surprising. The Torah here in Parshas Bechukosai never said that they didn’t keep Shmitta!

Not only that, but Rashi makes the calculation that from the entire time the Jews came into Eretz Yisrael, they NEVER kept Shmitta. That is incredible! How can it be that all those years they never kept Shmitta?

Rav Yaakov has a very beautiful approach to answer these questions. Rav Yaakov says that Parshas Behar and Parshas Bechukosai should really be read as one unit. Parshas Behar begins with Shmitta and then continues with Yovel (the Jubilee year). Next it continues with the halacha of cheating (Ona’ah). Then the Torah goes off on a tangent. But we should really focus on the beginning of Parshas Behar, which talks about Shmitta and then avoid getting distracted by all the intervening topics. Then, at the beginning of Parshas Bechukosai the Torah continues, “If you walk in the ways of my statutes...,” which Chazal say teaches us “You should be amelim b’Torah.”

In an agrarian economy (which was Jewish society – and virtually all society for that matter – in Biblical times), when you take off an entire year, what on earth do you do with your time? Remember the economy was 99% based on farming. The Torah says “stop farming” every seven years. Stop doing what you are doing. In years 49 and 50, “stop farming for two years straight.” What in the world are you supposed to do during Shmitta and Yovel? The answer is “You should be amelim in Torah.” That is why the Torah gave us a mitzvah of Shmitta.

Imagine if that were the situation today. Imagine if every seven years everyone would need to stop working. What are you supposed to do with your time? In those days, you could not even go onto the Internet – there was no Internet! What was there to do? The answer is that this is the way the system was set up. The system was set up so that every seven years, all of Klal Yisrael goes to Kollel. That is the way it was supposed to work.

The trouble is that we get sidetracked with all the intervening topics in Parshas Behar and we lose the main flow. The way it is supposed to really read is the mitzvah of Shmitta and then right after that “you should be amelim in Torah” – because that is what you are supposed to do during the seventh year. And then the Torah says, if you did not do that (“If you hearken not to Me...”) and you did

not take advantage of the Shmitta, in other words, by doing what you are supposed to be doing during that year, THEN the land will take its Sabbaths. Parshas Behar and Parshas Bechukosai are meant to be read together. The Torah is saying to take off a year. Sit and learn that year. Be amel in Torah during that year. If you wasted the year (or you worked during the year), you will be exiled in punishment and then the land will get its rest.

Rav Yaakov further explains that when Rashi says they did not keep Shmitta for the whole 490 years they were in Eretz Yisrael, it does not mean that they didn’t observe the law to abstain from agricultural work on the land. It means they didn’t use their free time during Shmitta as they were supposed to!

What is the takeaway lesson from this parsha here in the United States of America in 2023 when there is no Shmitta, and no one is taking off a year from their work? The lesson is how to make use of our time when we have the opportunity to not work – a legal holiday, a Sunday, or whenever it is. We don’t have a Shmitta but we have mini-Shmittas every week! Chazal say that we have Shabbos for people to learn on Shabbos. In America, we need to take advantage of our “Shabbos sheni shel galiyos” (Sundays).

What could be a more important message as we approach the holiday of Shavuos? Take advantage of the free time that we always have, and put that time to good use. This is what the Torah wanted out of Shmitta and this is what the Torah wants out of our vacations as well.

Transcribed by David Twersky; Jerusalem DavidATwersky@gmail.com Edited by Dovid Hoffman; Baltimore, MD dhoffman@torah.org This week’s write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand’s Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. A complete catalog can be ordered from the Yad Yechiel Institute, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD 21117-0511. Call (410) 358-0416 or e-mail [tapes@yadyechiel.org](mailto:tapes@yadyechiel.org) or visit <http://www.yadyechiel.org/> for further information. Rav Frand © 2023 by Torah.org. Torah.org: The Judaism Site Project Genesis, Inc. 2833 Smith Ave., Suite 225 Baltimore, MD 21209 <http://www.torah.org/learn@torah.org> (410) 602-1350 |

## Home Weekly Parsha B’HAR – BECHUKOTAI Rabbi Wein’s Weekly Blog

These two parshiyot together form the final bookend of the book of Vayikra. This conclusion of Vayikra is a rather somber one, with the dominant theme being the prediction of Jewish dereliction from Torah values and practices and the resultant exile from their land and sovereignty. Yet in these parshiyot there are also promises of prosperity and well-being and successful Jewish life.

The Torah generally conforms to such a pattern of great blessings and stern warnings. It really allows the Jews very little middle ground in which to maneuver the private and

national lives of Israel. Our entire history is one of great vacillation between exalted and miraculous moments and dire events.

This certainly is true regarding the story of the Jewish people and the Jewish State over the past century. Our tears are always mixed with joy and our joy is always laden with a heavy dose of accompanying tears. The Torah's message to us is that life constantly presents different emotions and scenarios that are rarely if ever completely positive or completely negative.

Perhaps this is one of the meanings of the words of the rabbis of the Talmud that everything that Heaven does has good within it. Even if the general event may be deemed to be a negative one, there always is a kernel of good buried within it. So, our parshiyot reflect this duality of blessing and accomplishment as well as of defeat and hardship. This duality also applies to our daily dealings with others. Always try to see the good lurking within another person whenever possible – though I admit that there are situations that make it look impossible to do so. This has always been a premier Jewish trait. The rabbis in Avot taught us that every person has his moment so to speak. Seizing and exploiting that moment is the main accomplishment.

But that requires a sense of realism. We cannot fool ourselves into thinking that everything is always correct and well with ourselves and our society, nor can we be so pessimistic and down on the situation that it precludes honest attempts at improvement. The balance of hope and warning that these concluding parshiyot of Vayikra exude is an important lesson and guidepost.

This lesson lies embedded in another teaching of the rabbis in Avot: "It is not incumbent upon you to complete the entire task at hand, but neither are you free to discard it entirely." Reality dictates to us that we face our world and its dangers squarely and honestly. But we should not abandon hope and the effort to improve our lot.

We believe that positive effort and wise decisions, coupled with faith and tradition allow us to survive and prosper. Therefore at the conclusion of the public reading of these mixed messages at the end of the book of Vayikra we rise and strengthen ourselves "Chazak chazak v'nitchzeik."

Shabat shalom.

Rabbi Berel Wein

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### **Family Feeling BEHAR, BECHUKOTAI Rabbi Jonathan Sacks**

I argued in my Covenant and Conversation for parshat Kedoshim that Judaism is more than an ethnicity. It is a call to holiness. In one sense, however, there is an important ethnic dimension to Judaism.

It is best captured in the 1980s joke about an advertising campaign in New York. Throughout the city there were giant posters with the slogan, "You have a friend in the Chase Manhattan Bank." Underneath one, an Israeli had

scribbled the words, "But in Bank Leumi you have mishpacha." Jews are, and are conscious of being, a single extended family.

This is particularly evident in this week's parsha. Repeatedly we read of social legislation couched in the language of family:

When you buy or sell to your neighbour, let no one wrong his brother.

Lev. 25:14

If your brother becomes impoverished and sells some of his property, his near redeemer is to come to you and redeem what his brother sold.

Lev. 25:25

If your brother is impoverished and indebted to you, you must support him; he must live with you like a foreign resident. Do not take interest or profit from him, but fear your God and let your brother live with you.

Lev. 25:35-36

If your brother becomes impoverished and is sold to you, do not work him like a slave.

Lev. 25:39

"Your brother" in these verses is not meant literally. At times it means "your relative", but mostly it means "your fellow Jew". This is a distinctive way of thinking about society and our obligations to others. Jews are not just citizens of the same nation or adherents of the same faith. We are members of the same extended family. We are – biologically or electively – children of Abraham and Sarah. For the most part, we share the same history. On the festivals we relive the same memories. We were forged in the same crucible of suffering. We are more than friends. We are mishpacha, family.

The concept of family is absolutely fundamental to Judaism. Consider the book of Genesis, the Torah's starting-point. It is not primarily about theology, doctrine, dogma. It is not a polemic against idolatry. It is about families: husbands and wives, parents and children, brothers and sisters.

At key moments in the Torah, God Himself defines His relationship with the Israelites in terms of family. He tells Moses to say to Pharaoh in His name: "My child, My firstborn, Israel" (Ex. 4:22). When Moses wants to explain to the Israelites why they have a duty to be holy, He answers, "You are children of the Lord your God" (Deut. 14:1). If God is our parent, then we are all brothers and sisters. We are related by bonds that go to the very heart of who we are.

The prophets continued the metaphor. There is a lovely passage in Hosea in which the prophet describes God as a parent teaching a young child how to take its first faltering steps: "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son ... It was I who taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by the arms ... To them I was like one who lifts a little child to the cheek, and I bent down to feed them." (Hosea 11:1-4).

The same image is continued in rabbinic Judaism. In one of the most famous phrases of prayer, Rabbi Akiva used the words Avinu Malkeinu, “Our Father, our King”. That is a precise and deliberate expression. God is indeed our sovereign, our lawgiver and our judge, but before He is any of these things He is our parent and we are His children. That is why we believe divine compassion will always override strict justice.

This concept of Jews as an extended family is powerfully expressed in Maimonides’ Laws of Charity:

The entire Jewish people and all those who attach themselves to them are like brothers, as [Deuteronomy 14:1] states: “You are children of the Lord your God.” And if a brother will not show mercy to a brother, who will show mercy to them? To whom do the poor of Israel lift up their eyes? To the Gentiles who hate them and pursue them? Their eyes are turned to their brethren alone.[1]

This sense of kinship, fraternity and the family bond, is at the heart of the idea of Kol Yisrael arevin zeh baze, “All Jews are responsible for one another.” Or as Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai put it, “When one Jew is injured, all Jews feel the pain.”[2]

Why is Judaism built on this model of the family? Partly to tell us that God did not choose an elite of the righteous or a sect of the likeminded. He chose a family – Abraham and Sarah’s descendants — extended through time. The family is the most powerful vehicle of continuity, and the kinds of changes Jews were expected to make to the world could not be achieved in a single generation. Hence the importance of the family as a place of education (“You shall teach these things repeatedly to your children …”) and of handing the story on, especially on Pesach through the Seder service.

Another reason is that family feeling is the most primal and powerful moral bond. The scientist J. B. S. Haldane famously said, when asked whether he would jump into a river and risk his life to save his drowning brother, “No, but I would do so to save two brothers or eight cousins.” The point he was making was that we share 50 per cent of our genes with our siblings, and an eighth with our cousins. Taking a risk to save them is a way of ensuring that our genes are passed on to the next generation. This principle, known as “kin selection”, is the most basic form of human altruism. It is where the moral sense is born.

That is a key insight, not only of biology but also of political theory. Edmund Burke famously said that “To be attached to the subdivision, to love the little platoon we belong to in society, is the first principle (the germ as it were) of public affections. It is the first link in the series by which we proceed towards a love to our country, and to mankind.”[3] Likewise Alexis de Tocqueville said, “As long as family feeling was kept alive, the opponent of oppression was never alone.”[4]

Strong families are essential to free societies. Where families are strong, a sense of altruism exists that can be

extended outward, from family to friends to neighbours to community and from there to the nation as a whole.

It was the sense of family that kept Jews linked in a web of mutual obligation despite the fact that they were scattered across the world. Does it still exist? Sometimes the divisions in the Jewish world go so deep, and the insults hurled by one group against another are so brutal that one could almost be persuaded that it does not. In the 1950s Martin Buber expressed the belief that the Jewish people in the traditional sense no longer existed. Knesset Yisrael, the covenantal people as a single entity before God, was no more. The divisions between Jews, religious and secular, orthodox and non-orthodox, Zionist and non-Zionist, had, he thought, fragmented the people beyond hope of repair.

Yet that conclusion is premature for precisely the reason that makes family so elemental a bond. Argue with your friend and tomorrow he may no longer be your friend, but argue with your brother and tomorrow he is still your brother. The book of Genesis is full of sibling rivalries but they do not all end the same way. The story of Cain and Abel ends with Abel dead. The story of Isaac and Ishmael ends with their standing together at Abraham’s grave. The story of Esau and Jacob reaches a climax when, after a long separation, they meet, embrace and go their separate ways. The story of Joseph and his brothers begins with animosity but ends with forgiveness and reconciliation. Even the most dysfunctional families can eventually come together.

The Jewish people remains a family, often divided, always argumentative, but bound in a common bond of fate nonetheless. As our parsha reminds us, that person who has fallen is our brother or sister, and ours must be the hand that helps them rise again.

[1] Mishneh Torah, Laws of Gifts to the Poor, 10:2.

[2] Mechilta de-Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai to Ex. 19:6.

[3] Edmund Burke (1729–1797). Reflections on the French Revolution: The Harvard Classics, 1909–14.

[4] Democracy in America, Chapter XVII: Principal causes which tend to maintain the democratic republic in the United States.

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### **Shabbat Shalom: Behar-Bechukotai 5783 (Leviticus 25:1-27: 34)**

**By Rabbi Shlomo Riskin**

Efrat, Israel – “The land must not be sold permanently, because the land is mine and you reside in my land as foreigners and strangers.” (Leviticus 25:23)

“You must not defile the Land upon which you live and in the midst of which I (God) dwell, since I (God), dwell in the midst of the children of Israel.” (Numbers 35:34)

The sacred Zohar teaches that the nation Israel, the Torah, and the Holy One Blessed be He are one. This suggests that the eternal God may be experienced and apprehended through those phenomena which are also perceived to be eternal. Since the covenantal nation Israel is eternal (by Divine oath, Genesis 15) and since the Torah is eternal,

Israel, the Torah and God are inextricably linked by virtue of their common eternity.

The land of Israel shares in this feature of eternity. The earth's perennial cycles of birth, growth, decay, death and rebirth, express a movement of re-generation and renaissance which informs the very nature of the most primitive form of life. There are intimations of immortality in the earth's movement from life to life: a fruit falls from the tree when it no longer requires the physical sustenance provided by attachment to the branch, and the tree re-births (regenerates) its fruit in the spring. The trees shed their leaves and fruits onto the earth, and when they decompose and merge with the earth, that very earth provides the necessary nutrients for the tree to continue to grow and bear fruit in the future. Plants leave their seeds in the ground, these continue to sprout plant life from the earth after the mother herb has been taken and eaten. And so the cycle of life, decay, death and rebirth is grounded in the eternal, infinite and natural dimension of the earth. In the words of the wisest of men, "one generation passes away and another generation arrives, but the earth abides forever" (Ecclesiastes 1:3).

In a more national sense, it is the Biblical tradition to bury our dead in the earth, and specifically in the land of Israel. The Biblical idiom for death is, "And he was gathered to his nation, or his family," for if one is buried in one's homeland, one's physical remains merge with the physical remains of one's family members, of those who came and died before as well as of those who will follow in the future.

Furthermore, the land of Israel is invested with a special metaphysical quality which is inextricably linked to Knesset Yisrael, historic Israel. The first Hebrew, Abraham, entered into the Covenant between the Pieces – the Divine mission of a nation founded on the principles of humans created in the image of God and the right of freedom for every individual – in the City of Hebron, and God's promise of world peace and messianic redemption will be realized in the City of Jerusalem. The Cave of the Couples – Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, Jacob and Leah – was the very first acquisition by a Jew of land in Israel as the earthly resting place for the founders of our faith. At the very same time, it is also the womb of our future, a future informed by the ideas and ideals of our revered ancestors. "Grandchildren are the crowning glory of the aged; parents are the pride of their children". (Proverbs 17: 6)

It is for this reason that the Talmud maintains that only in Israel is there a true and authentic "community" (B.T. Horayot 3) – for only in Israel do we see the footprints of historic Israel, the sweep of the generations, the "common unity" of tradition, from Abraham to the Messiah; Israel formed, prophesied and taught its eternal traditions and continues to live out its destiny within the land of Israel.

Moreover, the eternal Torah is rooted and invested in the very earth, stones and vegetation of the land of Israel. This is true not only in terms of the Biblical covenantal promise which guarantees our constant relationship and eventual return to Israel; it is also true because of the myriad of mitzvot (commandments) embedded in its bedrock, its soil, and its agricultural produce. The seventh Sabbatical year provides free fruits and vegetables for anyone who wishes to take them; the "corners" of the field actually "belong" to the poor every day of the year, and they may come and reap their harvests; tithes from the land's produce immediately go to the Kohen – Priest-teachers, the Levite Cantors, and the poor who share in the land of the rest of the nation. The land of Israel itself cries out to its inhabitants in the name of God: "The land must not be sold permanently, because the land is mine and you reside in my land as foreigners and strangers" (Leviticus 25:23). Hence God Himself, as it were, becomes inextricably linked – even "incorporated" or "in-corporeal-ized", if you will – within the peoplehood, the land and the Torah of Israel, the very objects and subjects which express God's will and out of which our essence and destiny is formed. Indeed, historic Israel, the land of Israel, the Torah of Israel and the Holy One Blessed be He, God of Israel and the universe are truly united in an eternal bond.

Shabbat Shalom

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<https://en.vhb.org.il/revivim1043/>

**The Mitzvah of Military Service versus Torah Study Revivim**

**By Rabbi Eliezer Melamed**

Yeshiva Har Bracha

In military service, two great mitzvot are fulfilled that are equivalent to the entire Torah – saving Israel from its enemies, and settlement of the Land \* Torah study is crucial for the existence of the nation of Israel, and must be assigned regular and serious frameworks, but it does not override the mitzvah of military service \* Nevertheless, in a situation where there is no security necessity to mobilize all yeshiva students, a handful of elites should be allowed to continue studying, so they can grow to become rabbis and public leaders

Q: Is the recent government proposal to exempt Haredi men from the age of twenty-one from military service correct according to Halakha?

A: It is appropriate to preface that the answers to all fundamental questions are found in the Torah, and if we look deeply, we will find that all our problems stem from the fact that we deviated from the path of the Torah. For example, in recent generations the question of whether to immigrate to Israel had arisen. There were Jews who despaired and preferred to assimilate, and there were those who, for various religious reasons, believed that for the time being, they should not immigrate to Israel. Had we fulfilled the great mitzvah and immigrated to Israel,

millions of Jews would have been saved from murder and extermination. The question of military service, which has preoccupied us for many years and caused social and political crises, also stems from a lack of understanding of Torah. This is the meaning of what our Sages said: “Be careful in Torah study, for an error in it, counts as deliberate sin” (Avot 4:13).

In the military service, two major mitzvot are fulfilled that are equivalent to all the mitzvot in the Torah: saving Israel from its enemies, and settling the Land.

#### The Mitzvah of Army Service – Saving Israel

Concerning the saving of a single Jew, we were commanded: “You shall not stand idly by the blood of your neighbor” (Leviticus 19:16), Shabbat is profaned for this, and our Sages said in the Mishnah: “Anyone who sustains one soul from the Jewish people, the verse ascribes him credit as if he sustained an entire world” (Sanhedrin 4:5). All the more so is the obligation to save a community of Jews, and for this purpose not only is it a mitzvah to desecrate Shabbat, but also a mitzvah to endanger lives, as we have learned, that in order to save even the property of a community living on the borders, Shabbat is desecrated and lives are endangered (SA, OH 329:6). All the more so is it a duty in order to save all of Israel. And in our times, it is a definite milchemet mitzvah (an offensive war), as Rambam wrote: “What is considered as milchemet mitzvah?... a war fought to assist Israel from an enemy which attacks them” (Laws of Kings 5:1), and this mitzvah requires self-sacrifice, and overrides an individual’s duty to protect his life (Maran Rabbi Kook in Mishpat Kohen 143; Responsa Tzitz Eliezer 13:100).

#### The Mitzvah of Settling the Land

The second mitzvah is the mitzvah of Yishuv Ha’Aretz (settling the Land of Israel), as written: “And you shall take possession of the land and settle in it, for I have assigned the land to you to possess...” (Bamidbar 33: 53-54). Our Sages said that this mitzvah is equal to all the mitzvot (Sifre, Re’eh 53). This mitzvah also overrides pikuach nefesh (preservation of human life) of individuals, since we were commanded to conquer the Land and the Torah did not intend for us to rely on a miracle, and seeing as in every war there are casualties, the mitzvah to conquer the Land obligates us to risk lives for it (Minchat Chinuch 425 and 604; Mishpat Kohen p. 327). All the more must we fight to protect regions of the country that are already in our possession, and every soldier who serves in the IDF is a participant in this great mitzvah.

The mitzvah of Yishuv Ha’Aretz is incumbent upon the Jewish people in every generation, as Ramban and many other poskim wrote. Only due to inability, seeing as we lacked the military and political possibility to settle the Land, we were unable to concern ourselves with its settlement during our long exile. Indeed, there are those poskim who believe that in the opinion of the Rambam, since the destruction of the Beit HaMikdash, there is no

mitzvah to conquer the Land. However, everyone admits that in the Rambam’s opinion, there is a mitzvah to live in the Land of Israel, and consequently, if after Am Yisrael lives in the Land, enemies come to conquer regions already in our possession, the mitzvah of Yishuv ha’Aretz requires us to fight to protect them, since it is forbidden to give parts of the Land of Israel to Gentiles (Davar Yehoshua 2, OC, 48; Milumdei Milchama 1; Peninei Halakha: Ha’Am ve’ Ha’Aretz 4: 2).

#### Conflict between Talmud Torah and Enlistment in the Army

With all the enormous importance of the mitzvah of Talmud Torah, it does not override the mitzvah of enlisting in the army. This is not just because of the well-known rule that any mitzvah that cannot be done by others, overrides Talmud Torah (Moed Katan 9a), since this rule also applies to private mitzvot, such as the mitzvah to pray, build a sukkah, grant a loan, and receive a guest. The mitzvah of enlisting in the army is much more important, because the existence of all of Israel depends on it.

We also find that the disciples of Yehoshua bin Nun and King David went out to war, and were not concerned about bitul Torah (wasting Torah study time). Furthermore, the Book of Bamidbar is called the ‘Book of Pikudim’ (census), because in it, all the male soldiers who were about to conquer the Land, are numbered.

Concerning what is said in the Talmud (Bava Batra 8a), that Torah scholars do not need guarding, the meaning is that they are exempt from guarding mainly intended to prevent theft. However, when Israel needs to be protected from its enemies, there is a mitzvah to save Jews, as is written: “You shall not stand idly by the blood of your neighbor” (Leviticus 19:16), and in pikuach nefesh – it is a mitzvah of the eminent Torah scholars first (Mishnah Berurah 328: 34).

#### The Importance of Torah Study by Yeshiva Students

Nonetheless, the mitzvah of Talmud Torah is equivalent to all the mitzvot, and there is no mitzvah that in the long run, protects and maintains the people of Israel more than it. Therefore, along with the mitzvah to serve in the army, there is a necessity to include in the life order of every Jew, years in which he devotes himself to the best of his ability, to the study of Torah. This is what our Sages said: “Studying Torah is greater than saving lives” (Megillah 16b), because saving lives concerns the current salvation of a human body, while Talmud Torah revives the soul and body of the Israeli nation for the long term. Therefore, even though in practice, whenever there is a need to engage in saving lives, saving lives overrides Talmud Torah, it is necessary to devote quality time to Torah study.

#### The Mitzvah of Recruitment, and the Mitzvah of Developing Torah Scholars

In practice, the mitzvah to enlist in the army applies to all of Israel, including those who wish to study Torah in yeshiva. True, when there is no security necessity to recruit

all the young men without exception, as was the case in the War of Independence, it is a mitzvah to postpone the recruitment of those interested and suitable for rabbinical positions, so they can study diligently and excel in the Torah, and when they become rabbis, contribute with their education and Torah to the strengthening of Jewish awareness, the security of Israel, and to settlement of the Land, as is the case within the ‘Atuda Tzeva’it’ (Academic Reserve Program), where talented soldiers study in order to later contribute more to the army.

And although there are great Torah scholars who combined military conscription in their first years of study in the yeshiva, nevertheless, many of those who deserve to be rabbis will be able to contribute more with their Torah to the people of Israel if they postpone their conscription, as long as they continue to develop their Torah studies in the yeshiva.

#### On the Condition They Appreciate the Mitzvah of Army Service

It is important to note that this contribution of Torah students can take place on the condition that the students treat with great respect the mitzvot of the soldiers who stand guard over our nation and our country, because only Torah learning stemming from this position can contribute to uplifting the spirit and heroism of Clal Yisrael. On the other hand, Torah study that denies the sanctity of the mitzvot of the soldiers is fundamentally unfounded, similar to the study of one who disbelieves in the mitzvot of Shabbat.

#### Agreement and Criticism of the Haredi Position

In light of this, we have no disagreement in principle with the Haredi public about the need to postpone the recruitment of diligent yeshiva students who are destined to become rabbis and educators. The appropriate postponement for teachers is a few years, whereas the appropriate postponement for rabbis is several years.

The criticism is in two areas: first, that those who study in yeshiva should study the Torah correctly, and consequently, respect the mitzvah of enlisting in the army. Second, only a few percentages that the public needs to postpone the draft in order to grow in Torah, as a kind of ‘reserve’, are permitted to postpone the draft; the rest, even if they study diligently, must fulfill the mitzvah of enlistment.

#### The Concern and the Solution

Indeed, one can understand the Haredim who fear that military service will cause a spiritual decline to the point of abandoning Torah and mitzvot. If this is the case, then it is an existential problem which cannot be compromised. However, the solution is not cancellation of the mitzvah, rather, in an effort to create a military path that does not endanger the spiritual future of the soldiers. Just as Jews are forbidden to violate Shabbat in order to go to synagogue, even when the concern is that not going to synagogue will cause them to leave religion, similarly, it is

forbidden to evade the mitzvah of army service because of this fear. Already today, students of the Hesder yeshiva have reasonable conditions that are adapted to the lifestyle of the religious public.

#### The Absurd Assumption

The argument of those opposed to the recruitment of Yeshiva students into the army is also based on the mistaken assumption that half of the members of the National- Religious public become secular, while among the Haredi public there is almost no abandonment of religion. But this assumption is so far-fetched, that it is hard to believe that there are rabbis who repeat it over and over again.

The problem is that it is indeed difficult to give exact numbers, because it is difficult to define who was religious from the start, and who became secular. In addition, both religious and Haredi society are made up of different groups. In the end, there is no big difference in the dropout rates, and this, in wake of the Haredi public’s agreeing to forgo an entire package of elementary mitzvot in order to keep their children within the Haredi framework. On the other hand, in the National-Religious public there are parents whose religious identity is quite weak. In light of this, the success of National-Religious education is enormous.

Even if in practice as a result of the observance of all the mitzvot, including recruitment to the army and Yishuv Ha’Aretz, the rate of deserters was significantly higher (as it was, to a certain extent, in the previous generation) – we would have had to fulfill all the mitzvot, and put more effort into education in order to adhere to the entire Torah, without neglecting any mitzvah. All the more so, when keeping them is not harmful, but beneficial.

#### Respect for Torah Scholars

During the days of counting the Omer, we must strengthen our respect for each other, especially among Torah scholars. Nonetheless, this does not demand concealing words of Torah, or agreeing to a mistaken opinion, but rather, to respect one another. In other words, even when one thinks that Torah scholars are making a serious mistake in the foundations of the Torah, one must continue to honor them for their dedication to Torah and all their good characteristics, and try to learn from them as much as possible.

#### Rabbi Eliezer Melamed

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### Parshiot BEHAR-BE’CHUKOTAI

#### by Rabbi Nachman Kahana

The challenges facing our generation

The “Tochacha” (reproach and admonition) in parashat Be’chukotai

Midrash Raba (Noach, chap 34):

עלובה העיסה שנחתומה מעיד עליה שהיא רעה – אמר רבי חייא רבא

Wretched is the bread whose baker testifies that it is bad.

In Parashat Noach (ibid), HaShem, the Creator of all things and their inherent natures, testifies:

כִּי יִצְרָא לְבֵב הָאָדָם רָע מִנּוּרָא

The nature of man is evil from birth.

Parashat Be'chukotai, which we will read this Shabbat, contains the harsh rebuke and warning (Tochacha) regarding the fate of the Jews if we repudiate our covenant with HaShem by not upholding the Torah.

The list is horrific. We will experience disease, starvation, military defeat, foreign subjugation, exile and more. These are terrible curses, but there are worse things that we have experienced in our history.

Why does the Tochacha omit the ravages of the Shoah, and what Christianity and Islam will have done to us in the years of our exile?

Why were we not warned about the Germans and their cohorts, who – in their insatiable hunger and unquenchable thirst to annihilate the entire Jewish people – invented and carried out historically unprecedented, apocalyptic, and satanic deeds.

We were dragged from our houses to the train station where they piled us into cattle-cars to be transported for days to unknown destinations without space, air, water, or food. When the trains arrived, the living were forced down with whip lashes and vicious dogs, stripped naked, branded with numbers, led into gas chambers, and then reduced to ashes. Our hair became raw material and our gold teeth sold to rich American financiers. Why were we not threatened that we would be turned into human skeletons to work for the Germans until our souls could not take it anymore? We would be subject to medical experiments by highly trained doctors, then thrown into open pits like refuse that needed to become invisible.

Why are these things not included in the threats regarding what would befall us if we repudiated our covenant with HaShem?

Answer:

Had the Torah spelled out in gory detail what awaits us if we reject the covenant, the naïve Jewish mind would have concluded that these verses are like “crying wolf”, meant only to frighten us with false alarms, because human beings could not possibly descend to such bestial and sadistic depths. So, the naïve Jewish mind would have rejected the entire Tochacha as unrealistic and not serious. However, the Germans and their allies were not demented or deranged; they were humans quite in control and very focused. Even capable of perpetrating these exact acts today, but it will not happen. For if in the last 2000 years, HaShem our “Father and King” (ונכָלָם וְנִיבָא) related to us more as King than Father, the miraculous establishment of Medinat Yisrael is HaShem’s unequivocal signal that “Father” has replaced “King”.

We are now in the era of:

ס (תְּהִילִים כב)הַמְּלֹכָה. וּמוֹשֵׁל בָּגָי 'כִּי לְה

For dominion belongs to Hashem and He rules over the nations.

הַמְּלֹכָה (עֹבְדִיה 'עַלְוּ מוֹשִׁיעִים בְּהַר צִיּוֹן לִשְׁפָט אֶת הַר עַשּׂוֹ. וְקַרְתָּה לְהָא)

Those who have been saved shall go up to Mount Zion to judge Mount Esau, and kingdom shall be of HaShem.

Zecharia 14 - And HaShem will be acknowledged as King over all the earth; on that day HaShem will be one and his name one.

Heart, Soul, and Might

Jewish history is a 3300-year bewildering succession of human events beyond reason and logic.

It involves shattered hopes that turned into salvation. Exile that exhausted our strength, but with perseverance turned into redemption, and mighty despotic rulers opposed by lonely men of faith who breathed hope and uplifted the spirits of the downtrodden. The nation, beloved and chosen by HaShem, whose martyrs at the hands of gentiles number in the many millions, nevertheless changed the world by creating “conscience” which led the gentiles from paganism to recognizing the omnipotent, invisible Creator. When viewed out of the box, the long arduous journey of Am Yisrael along the circuitous pitfalls of history is the unequivocal proof that there is a purposeful goal-orientated Creator who guarantees the eternal existence of the Jewish nation, even if we fall short of His demands.

Now to the realities of our contemporary lives. How can we know where HaShem is.

I submit:

The Gemara in Sanhedrin 97a:

תָּנָא דְבַי אַלְיָהו שְׁשָׁת אֱלֹפִים שָׁנָה הָוַי עַלְמָא שְׁנִי אֱלֹפִים  
תּוֹרָה שְׁנִי אֱלֹפִים יָמֹת הַמֶּשֶׁיחַ וּבְעוֹנוֹתָינוּ שְׁרַבּוּ יָצַא מֵהֶם שִׁיצָא

In the yeshiva of Eliyahu it was revealed that this world will exist for 6000 years, divided into three groups of 2000. The first 2000 will be a period of “tohu” (desolation, waste, emptiness, worthlessness) when cultures were being developed along the lines of the most debase instincts of man. Paganism and idolatry will capture the minds and hearts of humanity.

The second 2000 years will be centered around HaShem’s revelation to His chosen nation, and from us to the far corners of humanity.

The last 2000 years, of which we are a part, is the period of violent preparation for the Mashiach and his ultimate appearance.

The Jewish nation, beginning with our forefathers and mothers ’til this day, lived and are living through all three periods, each in a magnificent fashion weave together miracles and human effort.

The second sentence of Kriy'at Shema reads:

כָּל נְפָשָׁךְ וּבְכָל מְאַדְלָה יְהָוָה בְּכָל לְבָבֶךָ וּבְוְאַהֲבָתָה אֶת הָאָהָב

And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

I submit that “with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might” pertain to three different phases of Jewish history:

1- There are choices in life which are determined by one’s subjective evaluation of the facts and the alternatives at hand, and other choices which are immediate and reflexive, stemming from the deepest recesses of one’s soul. A man can meet 100 women in his quest for a wife and feel nothing; then he meets “the one” and becomes engulfed with the feeling that he has found his soulmate. This applies, as well, to an ideology or great moral issue where many people remain unmoved, but one particular individual feels an inner compulsion to become involved.

2- After the initial meeting between man and his woman or man and his ideology, there is a desire that the relationship develop and advance. He sends her flowers or devotes time and energy to the ideology of his initial attraction. If the relationship stagnates with no apparent progress, he might choose to leave the object of his attention or perhaps continue in the hope that eventually there will be mutuality.

3- If he continues, this unrequited relationship might cause him great anguish. The woman of his life can be cruel and heartless, or the moral ideal to which he has dedicated his life could cause him to be harshly punished. At this point one can choose to leave the relationship or to continue despite the hurt and anguish.

The Midrash relates (Otzer Ha'Midrashim, Eisenstein; Pesikta 884) that prior to presenting the Torah to the Jewish people, HaShem offered the Torah to the 70 basic races. The children of Esav refused when they became aware of the prohibition of murder, as did the children of Yishmael because of the prohibition against dishonesty, and all the other races for their particular reasons. But when offered the Torah, our ancestors, even before learning the Torah’s demands, replied spontaneously and unanimously na’aseh ve’nishma — “we shall do and we shall understand.”

To return to the second sentence of Kriy’at Shema:

לְהִיא בְּכָל לְבָבֶךָ וּבְכָל נֶפֶשׁ וּבְכָל מַאֲדָךְ וְאַהֲבָתְךָ ה’

And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

The intent of the first phrase, “with all your heart” is the compelling need to have God in one’s life, which expressed itself with the spontaneous and unanimous acceptance of Hashem’s Torah – na’aseh ve’nishma — “we shall do and we shall understand.”

For over 2500 years we have been serving HaShem in unparalleled loyalty with no explicit reciprocity as existed at the time of the prophets. We desire that our relationship with our Father in Heaven develop in mutuality; but there is silence at the other end. We feel that the relationship is not developing; nevertheless, we continue to loyally worship HaShem in total love and faith. This is the intent of the second phrase, “with all your life.”

Despite our total submission to God, our relationship has caused us untold anguish and pain throughout the two millennia of galut, leading to the unspeakable Shoah. Yet we continue without weakening our resolve to cling to HaShem at all costs. This is the intent of the third phrase, “with all your might.”

Now it all comes together.

The initial 2000 years of creation saw humanity develop in atheistic narratives or pagan theologies. Towards the end of this period, Avram from Aram (Iraq) entered upon the world’s stage to reveal the existence of an intelligent single Creator of all that exists. His teachings were accepted by many to the point that Hashem saw him worthy of being called Avraham, the spiritual father of many nations. This was the period of “with all your heart,” as stated in the Kriy’at Shema.

In the second 2000 years, HaShem appears more open towards humanity when he revealed His Torah and performed unprecedented miracles for Am Yisrael. It is the period of the two Batei Mikdash when our relationship with the Almighty became more tangible, as HaShem “dwells” in the Temples of Yerushalayim. This is the second period “with all your soul” in Kriy’at Shema.

The 2000 years following the destruction of the second Bet Hamikdash and our exile, and subsequent uprooting to galut is one of great dedication to HaShem, accompanied by the suffering that our faithfulness brings upon us. This is the third phrase “with all your might” in Kriy’at Shema.

In conclusion:

The challenges facing our generation are the return to Eretz Yisrael and continuing from the point in history when our independence was terminated by the now non-existent Roman empire.

Jewish life in the last 2000 years in galut, including contemporary communities, has been the struggle for physical and religious survival. In contrast, our lives in Eretz Yisrael are guaranteed by HaShem’s promise demonstrated through daily miracles.

Our efforts as a society are committed not merely to survival but to “flourishing” in every way. We here are preparing the way for the physical exodus from foreign lands, and spiritual exodus from foreign cultures and beliefs. In human terms, a metamorphosis cannot occur in one or two generations. The rust and crust have to be removed in phases in order to bring out the inherent spiritual and physical characteristics which were dominant in the students and soldiers of David Hamelech and will soon shine again in our children.

Shabbat Shalom

Nachman Kahana

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The midrash at the beginning of this week’s parsha mentions that the details of all mitzvos were taught at Sinai, making this topic extremely timely...

**Miscellaneous Mitzvah Matters**

## By Rabbi Yirmiyahu Kaganoff

### Question #1: Choosing your Mitzvos

"I don't have enough money for all the mitzvah objects that I need. Which should I purchase?"

### Question #2: Extra Mezuzos

"I have extra mezuzos. May I use them for tefillin?"

### Question #3: When Do We Recite a brocha?

"Why don't we recite a brocha when we put tzitzis onto a garment, yet we recite a brocha when we affix a mezuzah to a door?"

### Introduction

The first two of our opening questions deal with a very interesting issue: Are there hierarchies among our mitzvos? In other words, are some mitzvos more important than others?

We do not usually attempt to judge which mitzvah is more important, since it is our obligation to observe all the mitzvos to the best of our ability. Nevertheless, there are occasional circumstances when we must decide which mitzvah is more "valuable." One example when this could happen is when we must choose between observing one mitzvah and another. The Gemara (Rosh Hashanah 34b) discusses a situation in which one has to choose whether to spend Rosh Hashanah in a place where there is someone to blow shofar, but no Rosh Hashanah davening, or in another place where there is Rosh Hashanah davening, but no shofar. The Gemara concludes that it is more important to spend Rosh Hashanah in a place where there might be an opportunity to fulfill the mitzvah of shofar, than to go somewhere else where there will definitely be davening but no shofar blowing. This is because *safek d'oraysa*, a possibility of fulfilling a mitzvah *min haTorah*, carries more weight than definitively fulfilling that which is required only *miderabbanan*.

### Yerushalmi

A more revealing and detailed discussion is in the Talmud Yerushalmi, at the very end of Mesechta Megillah, which quotes a dispute between Shmuel and Rav Huna concerning someone who has only sufficient money to purchase either tefillin or mezuzah, but not both. The question debated in the passage of the Yerushalmi is: Which mitzvah is it more important to fulfill? The explanations provided in this passage of the Yerushalmi provide insight into other mitzvos, should these rules need to be applied. For example, should someone have to choose between purchasing the four species for Sukkos or materials for a sukkah, which takes precedence? (For simplicity's sake throughout the rest of this article, I will refer to the purchasing of the four species for Sukkos as simply the mitzvah of "lulav.") Or, should one have to choose between purchasing a lulav or purchasing tefillin, which takes precedence? This passage of Yerushalmi provides foundation for subsequent halachic discussion on these issues.

Let us quote the passage of the Yerushalmi:

Tefillin and mezuzah, which comes first? Shmuel said, "Mezuzah comes first." Rav Huna said, "Tefillin comes first." What is Shmuel's reason? Because mezuzah applies on Shabbos and Yom Tov. What is Rav Huna's reason? Because tefillin applies to people traveling on the seas and in deserts. A beraisa (teaching of the era of the Mishnah, but not included in the Mishnah) supports Shmuel, which says that if tefillin have worn out, one may use its parshiyos (written parchments) for mezuzah, but one may not use a mezuzah for tefillin, since we have a general rule that one increases but does not decrease sanctity.

To explain the Yerushalmi's conclusion: The mitzvah of tefillin requires use of four sections of the Torah, two in parshas Bo, and two others, the first two of the three parshiyos of *krias shma*, which are from parshas Va'eschanan and parshas Eikev. A mezuzah includes only these last two sections of the Torah. May one take the pieces of parchment that were used as a mezuzah and use them for tefillin, or vice versa -- if they were used for tefillin can they be used for a mezuzah?

### Understanding Shmuel

Shmuel contends that since mezuzah applies every day of the year, it is a greater and holier mitzvah than tefillin. The Gemara quotes two ramifications of this ruling:

(1) Should one be able to fulfill only one of these two mitzvos, mezuzah is preferred.

(2) Parshiyos once used for tefillin may be used for a mezuzah, but a mezuzah may not be used for parshiyos in tefillin. Since mezuzah is a holier mitzvah, using a mezuzah for tefillin decreases its sanctity, which is not permitted. This is because of a general halachic rule, *maalin bekodesh velo moridim*: something may be elevated to a use that is of greater sanctity, but it may not be reduced to a lower level of sanctity. For example, a kohein gadol can never return to being a kohein hedyot, a regular kohein. Since the beraisa quoted by the Yerushalmi states that one may not use mezuzah parshiyos for tefillin, the conclusion is, like Shmuel, that mezuzah is more important.

There is a question on Shmuel's explanation. In what way does mezuzah apply on Shabbos and Yom Tov, when one is not permitted to put a mezuzah on a door on either of these holidays, because of the melacha involved? The answer is that, if someone is required to affix a mezuzah but did not, he is not permitted to spend Shabbos in that house unless he has nowhere else to live (see *Pri Megadim*, *Orach Chaim*, *Eishel Avraham* 38:15; *Aruch Hashulchan*, *Yoreh Deah* 285:5). In other words, although one may not install a mezuzah on Shabbos or Yom Tov, the mitzvah still applies on those days.

### Understanding Rav Huna

Rav Huna explains that on days that one is obligated to wear tefillin, there are no exemptions from that responsibility. On the other hand, someone who has no residence is not obligated in mezuzah. In theory, one can exempt oneself from the mitzvah of mezuzah by avoiding

living in a residence. Therefore, tefillin is a greater mitzvah than mezuzah.

This has two ramifications:

(1) Should one be able to fulfill only one of these two mitzvos, tefillin is preferred.

(2) A mezuzah may be used for parshiyos in a pair of tefillin, but parshiyos used for tefillin may not be used for mezuzah. Since tefillin is a holier mitzvah, using parshiyos of tefillin for a mezuzah decreases their sanctity, which is not permitted.

How do we rule?

The Rosh (Hilchos Tefillin, Chapter 30) rules that the mitzvah of tefillin is more important, and this approach is followed by the Tur, the Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chayim 38:12), the Rema (Yoreh Deah 285:1) and the later authorities. The Rosh explains that tefillin is more important because a mitzvah de'gufei adif, literally a mitzvah of your body is more important. What does this mean?

One early acharon, the Beis Hillel (Yoreh Deah 285), understood the Rosh to mean that the mitzvah of tefillin is more important because one puts tefillin on his body, as opposed to mezuzah, which is on one's house, not body. Based on his reason, the Beis Hillel concludes that tefillin is more important than sukkah or lulav, since neither of these mitzvos is performed on one's body to the extent that tefillin is. Once the Beis Hillel is discussing which mitzvos are "more important," he discusses whether tefillin is more important than tzitzis or vice versa, concluding that tefillin are more important, since the name of Hashem is in the tefillin.

However, most authorities understand that the Rosh means something else. They explain that the mitzvah of tefillin is inherently obligatory, whereas the mitzvah of mezuzah is circumstantial. Every weekday there is an obligation for every adult Jewish male to don tefillin. The mitzvah of mezuzah is not inherently obligatory, but is dependent on one's living arrangements, and can be avoided completely (Gra; Rabbi Akiva Eiger, in his notes to Shulchan Aruch and Responsum 1:9; Aruch Hashulchan, Yoreh Deah 285:5). Furthermore, according to most authorities, mezuzah is obligatory min haTorah only if one owns the house in which he lives.

A big difference between these two approaches is germane to the mitzvos of lulav and sukkah. According to the Beis Hillel, these mitzvos carry less weight than tefillin. However, according to those who disagree with him, both of these mitzvos are inherently obligatory, just as tefillin. This would mean that, regarding the Rosh's criterion, all three of these mitzvos should be treated on an equal footing, and we would need to find other criteria to decide which of them is more important.

**Tefillin or Sukkah?**

Rabbi Akiva Eiger notes that the above-discussed passage of Yerushalmi provides an answer to this question. There it

stated that a mitzvah that occurs more frequently should be prioritized over one that occurs less frequently. Tefillin is far more frequently observed than either sukkah or lulav, and, therefore, should be treated with more priority than they are.

However, notes Rabbi Akiva Eiger, this question is usually moot for the following reason: When one has a mitzvah that he is obligated to observe immediately, he does not wait to fulfill it. Therefore, any time other than erev Sukkos, one who needs to choose between these mitzvos should use the funds to acquire tefillin, since he has that responsibility immediately, and the mitzvos of Sukkos will wait. If the situation occurs during chol hamoed Sukkos, the priority will be: sukkah, tefillin, lulav. This is because the mitzvah of sukkah is, at the moment, definitely min haTorah, whereas even those who wear tefillin on chol hamoed accept that it is disputed whether there is a mitzvah to wear them on chol hamoed. Therefore, sukkah, which is definitely a requirement min haTorah on all seven days of Sukkos, takes precedence over tefillin. Since the mitzvah of taking lulav is min haTorah only on the first day of Sukkos, but afterwards is required only miderabbanan (unless one is in or near the Beis Hamikdash grounds), tefillin will have precedence over lulav for those who wear tefillin on chol hamoed, which is the assumption that Rabbi Akiva Eiger makes.

**Tefillin versus tzitzis**

Rabbi Akiva Eiger agrees that tefillin is more important than tzitzis, but for a different reason than that provided by the Beis Hillel. Tzitzis is like mezuzah – there is only an obligation if he has a four-cornered garment, but it is not an automatic requirement. Although one is obligated to place tzitzis on any four-cornered garment that one owns and wears, one can avoid wearing four-cornered garments more easily than one can avoid living in a house that one owns. On the other hand, a man is required to wear tefillin every weekday.

**Difficulty with the Rosh**

Notwithstanding that all later authorities conclude that tefillin is considered a more "important" mitzvah than mezuzah, a difficulty is presented by the Rosh's conclusion. Why would he rule according to Rav Huna, when the Yerushalmi's conclusion is, like Shmuel, that mezuzah is a more important mitzvah?

The answer is that the Talmud Bavli (Menachos 32a) states the following: "A sefer Torah that wore out, or tefillin that wore out, cannot be used for a mezuzah, because one is not permitted to reduce something from a greater sanctity to a lower one." Thus, we see that the Bavli ruled according to Rav Huna, that tefillin is a greater mitzvah than mezuzah, and the halacha follows the Bavli over the Yerushalmi (Beis Yosef, end of Orach Chayim, Chapter 38).

**Practically speaking**

The Magen Avraham (38:15), one of the major halachic authorities, notes that, although the mitzvah of tefillin is

more important than mezuzah, in practice it might be better for someone to purchase mezuzos. Someone might be able to coordinate his schedule such that he can borrow tefillin from other people when he needs them for davening every day, something impractical to do with mezuzos. Thus, if he can thereby observe both mitzvos, he should purchase the mezuzos to allow this. This ruling is followed by the later authorities (Shulchan Aruch Harav; Mishnah Berurah; Aruch Hashulchan).

Nevertheless, the rule has not changed: Someone who will be unable to observe the mitzvah of tefillin should purchase tefillin first and wait until he has more resources before he purchases mezuzos (Shulchan Aruch Harav; Mishnah Berurah; Aruch Hashulchan).

#### Choosing your mitzvos

At this point, we can now address our opening question: “I don’t have enough money for all the mitzvah objects that I need. Which should I purchase?”

The halachic conclusion is:

He should first see which mitzvos he can fulfill without purchasing them. For example, he might be able to borrow tefillin, and he also might be able to use someone else’s sukkah. If he lives near someone else who is observant, he should be able to fulfill the mitzvah of lulav with someone else’s lulav. In earlier generations, it was common for an entire community to purchase only one set of four minim, and everyone used that set to fulfill the mitzvah. Mezuzah is more difficult to observe with borrowed items, and, therefore, he might need to purchase mezuzos ahead of tefillin, lulav, or sukkah, notwithstanding that they are obligatory mitzvos to a greater extent than mezuzah is.

Furthermore, which mitzvah he will need to observe first might be a factor, as we saw from Rabbi Akiva Eiger’s discussion about someone who needs to purchase tefillin, sukkah and lulav.

#### When Do We Recite a brocha?

At this point, we can discuss the third of our opening questions: “Why don’t we recite a brocha when we put tzitzis onto a garment, yet we recite a brocha when we place a mezuzah on a door?”

This question is raised by the Magen Avraham, in his commentary on the following words of the Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chayim 19:1): “Until one dons the garment, one is exempt from putting tzitzis on it. For this reason, one does not recite a brocha when one places the tzitzis on the garment, since the mitzvah is only when you wear it.”

The Magen Avraham (19:1) asks why we do not recite a brocha when putting tzitzis onto a garment, yet we recite a brocha when we affix a mezuzah to a door? The Magen Avraham answers that the reason is practical. Usually, one moves into the house first, before he installs the mezuzah, and, since he already lives in the house, he is responsible to have a mezuzah on the door. Thus, placing the mezuzah on the door is the fulfillment of the mitzvah and warrants a brocha. On the other hand, one does not usually place

tzitzis on a garment while wearing it, but before he puts it on, when there is no obligation yet to fulfill a mitzvah.

Based on his analysis, the Magen Avraham rules that should any of the tzitzis tear off a garment while someone is wearing it, and he attaches replacement tzitzis while he is still wearing it, he should recite a brocha prior to attaching the replacement. The brocha he would recite in this instance is *Asher kideshanu bemitzvosav vetzivanu la’asos tzitzis*, which translates as a brocha “to make tzitzis,” a text that we do not have recorded by any earlier authority. Notwithstanding his conclusion, the Magen Avraham rules that this is not the preferable way to act, but, rather, he should remove the tzitzis once they become invalid and attach replacement tzitzis without a brocha. On the other hand, the Magen Avraham contends that if a mezuzah falls off or becomes invalid, the occupant is not required to relocate until he can replace the mezuzah. The difference between the two cases is how much tira’ah the person is required to undergo – one is required to remove a pair of tzitzis, which is a simple act, but not required to relocate himself and his family until he has a chance to replace or reaffix the mezuzah.

The Magen Avraham then suggests that if someone affixed a mezuzah before he moved into a house, he should not recite the brocha when he affixes the mezuzah, but when he moves in he should recite the brocha, *Asher kideshanu bemitzvosav vetzivanu ladur babayis sheyeish bo mezuzah*, “to live in a house that has a mezuzah,” again, a new text of a brocha not recorded by any earlier authority.

The Birkei Yosef (Orach Chayim 19:2) disagrees with the Magen Avraham, contending that we should not create texts of brochos that we do not find in early sources. In regard to the Magen Avraham’s question, why do we recite a brocha upon affixing a mezuzah but not upon placing tzitzis, the Birkei Yosef provides a different answer: Chazal required a brocha on the last act that you do to fulfill a mitzvah. In the case of tzitzis, it is when you put on the garment. In the case of mezuzah, it is when you affix it. However, if there is a mezuzah on the door already, one does not recite a brocha upon moving into a house, since one did not perform any act to fulfill the mitzvah.

#### Conclusion

A famous quotation from a non-Jewish source is: “Is G-d more concerned about what comes into our mouth or what comes out?” This question assumes that some of Hashem’s mitzvos are more “important” for us to observe than others. The Torah’s answer is that it is not for us to decide which of the mitzvos is more important. One grows in one’s relationship with Hashem through each opportunity to perform a mitzvah.

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#### Rabbi YY Jacobson

#### The First Manual for Addicts

#### “My Contract Preceded His Contract”

Regression

The portion this week, Behar, is “the poor man’s portion.” It is dedicated entirely to the poor. In Behar, the Torah legislates numerous majestic and sometimes breathtaking laws in order to protect and assist the poor person.

Among other items it discusses a regression in poverty: a person becomes so desperate that he is forced to sell his ancestral field or farm in the land of Israel; worse, a person is compelled to sell a home used for work in the fields; worse, the situation grows so difficult, a person is forced to sell his residential home.

Worse yet, the circumstances are so dire that he sells himself as a slave to another Jew. (This can usually only be for a maximum of six years. Even if he insists to remain longer, he must leave during the year of Jubilee, which came about every 50th year. If Jubilee comes around in two years, he goes free then. [1] A Jew can’t sell him as a slave for more than 50 years.[2])

Worst is the following situation described in Leviticus (Behar) chapter 25 verse 47:

כִּי תִשְׁגַּן יְדֵךְ וְתוֹשֵׁב עַמְּךָ וְמִקְּרֵב אֲחִיךָ עַמְּךָ וְנִמְכַר לְגַר תֹּשֶׁב עַמְּךָ אֵז  
לְעַקְרֵב מִשְׁפָּת גָּר.

If a resident non-Jew gains wealth with you, and your brother becomes destitute with him and is sold to a resident non-Jew among you or to an idol of the family of a non-Jew.

In this case, he did not only sell himself to another Jew, where at least the culture and lifestyle are similar; but he sold himself as a slave to a non-Jew, where the entire lifestyle is different.[3] The Torah then goes on to command his next of kin to redeem him from his master, by compensating the master for the money he paid to purchase the Jew and thus setting the slave free.

אַחֲרֵי נִמְכַר גָּלָלה תְּהִנֵּה לוֹ אַחֲרֵי מְאַחֵינוּ יִגְּלִנּוּ: אָז לְדוֹ אָז בְּנֵי יִגְּלִבּוּ  
אוֹ מִשְׁאָר בְּשָׂרוֹ מִמְּשִׁפְּחוֹתָיו יִגְּלִבּוּ אָז הַשִּׁגָּה דָּדוֹ וְגַנְגָּלָל:

After he is sold, he shall have redemption; one of his brothers shall redeem him. Or his uncle or his cousin shall redeem him, or the closest [other] relative from his family shall redeem him; or, if he becomes able to afford it, he can be redeemed [through his own funds].

גַּת הַיּוֹלֵד הַוְּאַתְּ וְבָנָיו עַמּוֹדָם לֹא יִגְּאַל בָּאָלָה וְנִצְאָבָשׁ:

And if he is not redeemed through [any of] these [ways], he shall go out in the Jubilee year, he and his children with him.[4]

In other words, according to Torah law, the Jewish slave can never sell himself for eternity. Redeemed or not, when Jubilee comes around, the Jewish slave automatically goes free.[5]

Absentee Father?

When the Torah mentions the relatives who are to redeem the Jew who sold himself, the Torah enumerates first the brother of the slave, then, the uncle, the cousin, followed by any other relative.

But there is a blatant omission here: The one relative who should have been mentioned first. The father.

The Torah also omits the mention of a mother and sisters. Yet this is understood, for in most cases the mother and sisters were being supported by their husbands. They lacked the means to redeem the slave. The Torah also omits the slave’s son. This too can be explained by the fact that the father usually supports the son, not vice versa.[6] But why is the father not mentioned?

There is another question: The Torah enumerates the relatives who ought to redeem the slave in this order: brother, uncle, first cousin, any other next of kin, and finally the slave himself.

The reason why the Torah feels it necessary to enumerate all the family members instead of just saying "anyone of his family" is to teach us that there is an order of responsibility on who is to redeem the slave. The closest relative, a brother, must be first to step up to the plate.[7] Then the uncle; then the first cousin, etc.

Accordingly, if the slave obtains the means to redeem himself, it is his responsibility to redeem himself before anyone else. If you have the money to give yourself freedom, you can’t ask your brother or uncle to do it for you. If so, the Torah should have mentioned first the option of the slave redeeming himself. And yet, in reality, he is mentioned as the last option: After mentioning all the relatives, the Torah concludes “if he becomes able to afford it, he can be redeemed [through his own funds].” [8]

The Disease

Each law in the Torah, even those not presently applicable, represents a truth that applies to all times, peoples, and places.

The above law is no different: though today—150 years after the Civil War which began in April 1861 and claimed 620,000 lives plus the US President—no one in the civilized world can sell himself as a slave, the concept behind this biblical law applies in our age as well, maybe even more than ever.

Today we also sell ourselves as slaves. There are people, young and old, women and men, teenagers and adults, who reach a place in life where they do not own themselves any longer. Something else owns them entirely. They have no control over their lives. They are addicts. Addiction is not a bad habit exercised frequently; it is a disease. The addiction OWNS the addict. He does not own himself or herself any longer.

Addictions come in many forms: drugs, alcohol, gambling, nicotine, sexual addictions, food, etc. We become addicts usually due to a profound void, or some major trauma or pressure in life. Sometimes it begins with fun and entertainment, but soon the innocent fun lover has become a slave to his or her addiction.

Powerlessness

Someone, who has an alcohol and gambling addiction, once shared with me what prompted him into recovery. He was in Atlantic City in a casino gambling away his fortune. It was late afternoon, he was drinking wine and gambling.

A man approached him and said: Do you know it's Yom Kippur today?!

He suddenly realized that it was the time for the Neilah prayer, the fifth and final holiest service of the holiest day of the year. This gave him a sudden clarity that he was powerless over his gambling habit. It catapulted him to seek help.

That is why the first step of the 12-step program for recovery is: "We admitted we were powerless over our addiction—that our lives had become unmanageable." The first step toward liberation is to realize you are a slave; you really do not own yourself any longer. You have been sold.

#### The Role of a Father

Comes the Torah and tells us that it is our responsibility and privilege to help and redeem the addict, the slave, from his incarceration. The brother, the uncle, the cousin, or any relative must not spare money, time, and effort to help the addict set himself or herself free.

Yet the Torah neglects to mention the possibility of his father being the redeemer. Because if he had a father—a true father, a father who would have been there for his son in the way the father is supposed to be—this would have not come about.

We are not referring only to a biological father but to an emotionally present father. A father is not only someone who gives his child food and shelter and takes him to his first baseball game or (l'havdil) to the synagogue on Sabbath. A father is not only the one who is responsible to pay the bills. That is, of course, part of fatherhood. But it is not the essence of the father.

What is a father? A father is the one who gives inner confidence to his children. The father, if he lives up to his calling, imbues in his children the conviction that they are great human beings, who can stand up to any challenge they encounter on the winding journey called life and live life to the fullest. Father is the one who empowers his children to know the depth of their dignity, the power of their souls, and the ability to forge their destiny successfully.

This is not a blame game. Sometimes the father tried hard and really meant well. He may have simply not had the tools to be there for his child in the way the child needed it, to provide him/her with the attachment the child desperately craved. Maybe the father never had a father to mentor him. Sometimes the father fulfilled his duty, but other circumstances have traumatized the child. Some fathers are incredible role models and leaders, but a perpetrator has laid waste to the brain of the child. Yet, the Torah is saying, the full emotional presence of a father (and of course a mother) achieves miracles--and it is never too late to be a father, because, at any and every age, we all need a loving and empowering father.

Joseph did not lose his dignity and did not sell his soul to Potifar's wife because "he saw the visage of his father." He felt the presence of a father who believed in him even when

he did not believe in himself. Never underestimate the power of a parent's deep and unwavering attachment, even if a situation seems dismal. Trauma is the absence of attachment; true and attuned attachment creates miracles.

#### I Want a Father

I heard the following story from Rabbi Sholom Ber Lispker, spiritual leader of The Shul in Bal Harbor, Florida. A man requested a meeting with him, during which he unraveled the following tragic story. He was married, with a teenage son in the house. Yet he grew bored with his wife, fell in love with another woman, and ultimately divorced his wife.

After the divorce, the boy remained with his father and treated the new woman who would come visit his father often very disrespectfully, blaming her for the destruction of the family unit. The child, for good reason, spoke very obnoxiously to her.

When the father proposed to her, she made a condition. She would not marry him unless his teenage son would move out of their home in Bal Harbor, Florida. She does not want to see the face of that boy again.

The father, who is extremely wealthy, called in his child. He handed him an envelope with \$20,000 cash; gave him the keys to a new Ferrari; gave him a few credit cards for use, to be paid for each month by the father, and finally, he gave him keys to a beautiful flat on the ocean. The father then silently added one stipulation: Son, all of this is yours; take it and enjoy, but you can't step foot into this house anymore... if you need me, give me a call, and I will come to visit you.

The boy took the cash, the credit cards, the keys, and threw them back at his father, and said: "I don't want your money, your car, your houses, your richness. All I want is a FATHER!"

Now, he was coming to Rabbi Lispker, to ask him what to do.

This is the tragedy of a father who never had the time or the courage to communicate to his child that one feeling: I am here for you. All of me, all of the time; I believe in you. You are truly awesome. You are a gift from G-d and I love you and remain proud of you.

A father is the one who communicates to his child the message the Baal Shem Tov's father, Rabbi Eliezer, shared with his five-year-old son before he died: "You need not fear anyone or anything in this world, but G-d."

#### Dad, Where Are You?

This is why there is no mention of the father in the process of redeeming the addicted slave. Had this addict had a "father," or had the child had the ability to feel and experience his father, he would not find himself in his current situation. The reason a child can become such a tragic slave is that he did not have a presence in his life who taught him about his Divine inner strengths, powers, and majesty. The greatest tragedy, said Chassidic master

Rabbi Aharon of Karlin, is when a person forgets that he is a prince, a child of G-d.

If you believe you are a prince, you can withstand the greatest temptations; if you think you are valueless, the smallest temptations can drive you to the abyss.

Or perhaps he had a father who gave it all. But the child was so hurt that he shut out his father, he can't even feel his father. This only means that the father must never take it personally, and maintain an even stronger attachment.

### In the End, It's Up To You

We can now appreciate why the Torah leaves the option of the slave redeeming himself for the last because in his current situation, he is incapable of freeing himself. He is powerless.

But we must help him go free. The addict is powerless over his problem, hence his closest family members are commanded to come to his rescue; brothers, uncles, cousins, or any relative.

But ultimately they are only catalysts. They cannot solve his problem; they can only help him see his own situation with clarity. They can give him the support he needs to HELP HIMSELF. If he does not make the decision to set himself free from the shackles of addiction, nothing can save him.

This, then, is why the Torah lists the enslaved person as the final prospect; his family can help him realize his problem and provide adequate support, but ultimately only he holds the key to his freedom. In the end, the addict himself or herself must find the resources to go free.

### The Source of Freedom

But CAN the addict free himself? How can he or she liberate themselves from their addiction or any other situation which seems to be all-powerful?

Comes the Torah and concludes:

לְיִבְנֵי-וַיָּצֵא בְּשָׁנָה הַיּוֹלֶד, הַוָּא וְבָנָיו עַמּוֹ. פִּי--לֹא יַגְאֵל, בְּאַלְהָ-וְאַם הַצֹּאתִי אֶתְּתֶם מִאָרֶץ מִצְרָיִם: אָנִי, הָעָבֶדֶת קָם, אֲשֶׁר-יִשְׂרָאֵל, עַבְדָּיכֶם אַל-קִיכְמָה.

On Jubilee, he will automatically go free. He and his children with him. Because the children of Israel are servants to ME, they are My servants; I have taken them out of Egypt.

Here is where the Torah reveals the true source of our freedom. How can the slave automatically be freed on the Jubilee year? The answer is: "The children of Israel are servants to ME, they are My servants." We have only one master, G-d, and any subsequent sale to another master is merely superficial; it's not a real sale.

In the words of Rashi: "Shtari Kodem." G-d says, "My contract precedes your contract." The divine contract proclaiming that He owns each of us precedes the contract of the slave owner. I may sign a contract with you for my house, but there is one problem: someone else has a previous contract!

I may sell my soul to addiction; I may sell my mind, heart, and schedule to addiction. But before all of the addiction

began, my soul already belonged to G-d. On my deepest level, I am Divine. I am not an addict. I am a mirror of infinity, a fragment of G-d. My addiction may be powerful but it cannot penetrate the essence of my being. My being belongs to G-d. There is a core self, sacred and wholesome, which is more powerful than all my trauma, abuse, and addiction.

All the addictions and desires that control me are ultimately external. Each and every one of us has only one true allegiance: Our oneness with the Infinite One. Thus, in the end, a "jubilee" will come and set us free.

### The Camel

A mother and a baby camel were lying around, and suddenly the baby camel asked, "mother, may I ask you some questions?"

Mother said, "Sure! Why son, is there something bothering you?"

Baby said, "Why do camels have humps?"

Mother said, "Well son, we are desert animals, we need the humps to store water and we are known to survive for weeks without water."

Baby said, "Okay, then why are our legs long and our feet rounded?"

Mother said, "Son, obviously they are meant for walking in the desert. You know with these legs I can move around the desert better than anyone does!"

Baby said, "Okay, then why are our eyelashes long? Sometimes it bothers my sight."

Mother with pride said, "My son, those long thick eyelashes are your protective cover. They help to protect your eyes from the desert sand and wind as you trek hundreds of miles."

The Baby, after thinking, said, "I see. So the hump is to store water when we are in the desert, the legs are for walking through the desert, and these eyelashes protect my eyes from the desert. If so, what in heaven's name are we doing here in a cage in the Bronx Zoo?!"

We were not made to be locked in a cage. We were meant to be free. G-d's contract precedes every other "contract" you might make in life, including those in which you sell yourself to the tyrants of addiction.

### Yogi Berra

In 1973 the New York Mets struggled in last place in the National League Eastern division midway through the season. The team's colorful manager, the legendary Yogi Berra, had done wonders in the past, leading the team to its first-ever World Series championship in 1969, but this season looked to most observers like a wash. Asked by a sports reporter for one of the New York papers if the season was over for the Mets, Yogi responded with what has become one of his most famous "Yogi-isms," a declaration that put an exclamation point on what was to be one of the most exciting comebacks in sports history: "It Ain't Over 'Til It's Over!"

As history shows, it indeed wasn't over. Yogi Berra's New York Mets went on to take the National League East division and capped off the season by winning the National League Pennant and going to their second World Series contest.

In your life "it ain't over" until G-d says it's over—and G-d says it's not over until you win. Your moral and spiritual victory is guaranteed, because "My contract precedes any other."<sup>[9]</sup>

[1] Obviously, the sale had to reflect this fact. If Jubilee was close, the price was less.

[2] According to Torah law, Jews observed two special years Shmita (Hebrew: שְׁמִיטָה, literally "release"), and Yovel, or Jubilee. 14 years after the Jews entered the land of Israel and finished conquering and dividing the land, they began counting every seventh year. The seventh year of the cycle was called shmitah, during that year the land is left to lie fallow. All agricultural activity—including plowing, planting, pruning and harvesting—is forbidden by Torah law. Other cultivation techniques—such as watering, fertilizing, weeding, spraying, trimming and mowing—may be performed as a preventative measure only, not to improve the growth of trees or plants. Additionally, any fruits which grow of their own accord are deemed hefker (ownerless) and may be picked by anyone.

After seven shmitos, 49 years, comes the 50th year known as Yovel or Jubilee. This year has all of the laws of a regular shmitah year, plus all slaves are set free and all fields soils are returned to their ancestral owner.

[3] According to Jewish law, only a man can sell himself as a slave, never a woman.

[4] Though his children were not sold into slavery, the master is obligated to support them throughout the ordeal (Rashi). Hence in a sense, they too are under his authority.

[5] This is referring to a situation where the non-Jew is living in the Holy Land under the jurisdiction of a Jewish State, and hence is obliged by the Torah law.

[6] In the case where the son is supporting his father, we can assume that if he didn't help his father out and allowed him to sell himself into slavery he probably won't redeem him. If he sold him once, he will sell him twice. But a father on the other hand, even if he sat by idly and let his son be sold into slavery, once he sees him in slavery, his fatherly love - which is a lot stronger than a son's love to his father- is aroused and surely he would make the effort to redeem him. Yet, the Torah chooses not to mention that option.

[7] According to Jewish law, if there is a father with means, he has the first responsibility to set his son free since he is closest in kin. Which only exacerbates the previous question of why the Torah omits the mention of a father.

[8] One possible answer is that according to natural circumstances, it is the most unlikely that the slave himself will find the means to set himself free. For if he would

have any money he would not be forced to sell himself for the sake of money. Hence the Torah gives that option last since it is the most unusual.

[9] This essay is based on a talk delivered by the Lubavitcher Rebbe on Shabbos Parshas Behar 5723, 1963. Published in Likkutei Sichos vol. 17 Parshas Behar.

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### Parshas Behar-Bechukosai

#### Rabbi Yochanan Zweig

This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Chana Necha bas Yaakov.

#### Brotherly Love

If your brother becomes impoverished and his hand falters in your proximity, you shall hold on to him [...] (25:35).

A puzzling Midrash Tanchuma discusses the concept of having the responsibility to help a poor person. The Midrash states that if we don't help a poor person now, the following year he will need a lot more help (very similar to what Rashi comments on our possuk; see Rashi ad loc). The Midrash ends by saying that if we neglect to fulfill our responsibility to help we are actually robbing the poor.

This Midrash statement requires clarification: Why is it that if we don't help a poor person he will need exponentially more help later? Perhaps we can reasonably assume that he will need twice as much help (last year's shortfall and this year's shortfall), yet Rashi says that not helping immediately will cause the future need to be more than five times the present need. How can this be true?

Additionally, how is not giving charity equal to stealing from the poor? It seems very difficult to equate not giving charity with stealing when one is a sin of omission and the other is a sin of commission.

We find a remarkable Gemara (Brachos 6b) that discusses an enigmatic admonition from the prophet Yeshaya: "What you have stolen from the poor is in your houses" (Yeshaya 3:14). Rashi (Brachos 6b) explains that the Gemara wonders why we are singling out stealing from the poor. After all, stealing from the rich is also a terrible sin! Additionally, it doesn't even make sense to expend the effort to steal from the poor; how much can one realistically take? (As the famous bank robber Willie Sutton supposedly answered when asked why he robs banks: "because that's where the money is.")

To explain what it means to steal from the poor the Gemara says, "This is referring to a situation where one greets you and you ignore him." Obviously, this is improper, even boorish, behavior; but why do Chazal refer to this as stealing? What in fact did you actually take?

The answer is that you took his self-respect. By ignoring his friendly overture you actually made a very clear statement about what you think of him – that he isn't an entity worthy of a response. You denigrated his very existence. Obviously, this is very painful for anybody to experience, but it is particularly devastating to a poor

person who already feels depressed about his situation and his stature.

The possuk in this week's parsha instructs us very explicitly on how we should view a fellow Jew who has fallen on hard times, "If your brother becomes impoverished [...]." In other words, we have to treat someone who needs our help as we would a blood brother. When a person helps his brother, he does not consider it charity; a person ought to consider it a privilege to be able to help his family because he wants to see them succeed. A child who receives help from his parents isn't made to feel like a charity case. Quite the opposite, he feels love and support, and ultimately validation, from his parents.

When we ignore the needs of a poor person we are taking away his self-esteem, and telling him that he isn't worthy of our help. Destroying a person's self-respect will predictably lead to dire consequences. A person with low self-esteem has no interest in improving his situation because he feels inadequate, incapable, and unworthy of better circumstances. This is why if you don't help a poor person the following year it becomes exponentially worse; destroying his self-esteem creates a devastating downward spiral.

Therefore, when we give charity, we must make every effort to ensure that the recipient doesn't feel like a charity case; he must feel that it is our honor to be able to help because we believe in him and respect him. If a person knows that he has a backer who believes in him, he will inevitably "pull himself up by the bootstraps" and improve his own situation. The Torah is teaching us that the antidote to poverty is creating a relationship with someone who needs our help. Ultimately, this validation enables them to help themselves.

#### Jewish American or American Jew

If you walk in my statutes, and keep my commandments, and do them [...] (26:3).

The second parsha of this week's double parsha Torah reading delves into great detail about the rewards for following the commandments and the absolutely horrific consequences for not doing so. Interestingly, Rashi (ad loc) actually redefines walking in the statutes as being deeply immersed in the study of Torah. Likewise, when the Torah begins to describe the tragic consequences of not listening to Hashem (see 26:14 and Rashi ad loc), Rashi comments that these terrible punishments come as a result of not being deeply immersed in Torah study.

Yet when the Torah explains why all these terrible consequences will eventually befall the Jewish people, the Torah explicitly, and repeatedly, lays the blame on Bnei Yisroel for not keeping the laws of Shemittah (see 26:34-35 ad 26:43). In fact, Rashi himself goes through the calculation of the years of exile to reconcile it exactly with the amount of Shemittah years Bnei Yisroel didn't keep while in Eretz Yisroel, and states that this inexorably led to the expulsion of Bnei Yisroel from Eretz Yisroel (see Rashi

26:35). So why does Rashi feel compelled to cite the sin of not being immersed in Torah study as the key failing that led to the exile of Bnei Yisroel when it seems to contradict what the Torah outright tells us?

As explained in prior editions of INSIGHTS, the key test in leaving Egypt was whether Bnei Yisroel identified themselves as Jews or as Egyptians. This is why they had to place the blood on the doorways of their houses; to visibly declare that it was a house of proud God fearing Jews. This explains many of the details relating to who left Egypt and who didn't.

Perhaps the greatest spiritual test in the history of the Jewish people has been that of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The clearest example is the ubiquitous adoption by the Jewish community of the surrounding secular culture. A simple but telling proof is the obsession with sports. While our Jewish institutions (shuls, schools, mikvaot, etc.) have to beg people to attend their functions, these very same religious Jews clamor to spend \$4,000 for a seat at a playoff basketball or football game.

Historically, Jewish exile has brought Jews closer to one another and caused them to identify themselves in a distinctly Jewish manner. A prime example of this was the development of a uniquely Jewish language by which to communicate. In European countries there was Yiddish, in the Spanish countries there was Ladino, and in Iran it was a Judaeo-Farsi dialect. In other words, and for a variety of reasons, we chose to culturally identify as Jews.

Today, Jews are more comfortable identifying with sports teams. We wear clothes and other memorabilia carrying our "home team" colors and logos. We proudly adorn our children with team jerseys of the local sports' "heroes." Some of us go so far as to obtain significant sports memorabilia and decorate the walls of our homes with it. This odd behavior is unique to the current American (and perhaps western society) exile. Can anyone possibly imagine our great grandparents in Europe wearing a sports jersey of the Polish national team? They would probably look at you cross-eyed and say, "What connection do I have to a couple of crazy goyim kicking a ball down the field like six year olds?"

The entire purpose of Hashem throwing us into exile is to bring us closer as a people; to learn to take care of one another, reinforce within us the unique qualities we have as Jews, and make us appreciate who we are. After all, nothing brings us together more than a mortal enemy and an existential threat. Today we have lost sight of this ideal; is it any wonder it has led to one of the greatest spiritual holocausts in the history of the Jewish people? We are embracing the surrounding non-Jewish cultures and ideals and it is killing us.

This is what Shemittah was supposed to reinforce. While we don't work the fields or harvest the fruits, we are brought closer as a nation, and a familial feeling is developed. Anybody can walk onto anybody else's field

and take whatever he needs, as if it was one of their closest relatives property. Just as I would be comfortable walking into my sister's home and opening the refrigerator to see what she had to eat, so too I can pick my neighbors fruit. Shemittah provides a sense of shared space like one big family.

This is also the reason that Shemittah causes all personal loans to be cancelled. After all, if my brother can't pay me back would I really want to pressure him? Would I ever dream of charging my mother interest on a loan?

The fact that Bnei Yisroel didn't keep a single Shemittah means that they were estranged from one another. Naturally, the consequence for this lesson not learned is to be exiled and forced to learn how much we need each other. Unfortunately, only by being thrown to the wolves of

the nations of the world, where we are constantly hounded for being who we are, do we learn how badly we need one another as Jews.

Rashi is saying that if we had only immersed ourselves in Torah we could have avoided all the pitfalls. That alone would have been enough to establish our unique cultural and familial bond. We would then understand that we are a unified nation; and that would have been the basis on which to build a cohesive and supportive society. As Chazal teach us; the study of Torah builds unity – Talmidei Chachamim bring shalom to the world (Brachos 64b). Had we properly devoted and immersed ourselves in Torah we would have avoided the need for the punishment of exile.

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לע"ג

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

## **PARSHAT BECHUKOTAI**

### **THE CONCLUSION OF SEFER VAYIKRA**

Considering that Sefer Vayikra is primarily a book of laws, it would certainly be appropriate to conclude those laws by explaining their reward - and that is exactly what we find in Parshat Bechukotai! Review Vayikra chapter 26 - better known as the '**tochacha**' - noting how it describes the reward (/or punishment) for keeping (/or defying) God's laws.

Hence, chapter 26 forms a fitting conclusion for the entire book. So why does Sefer Vayikra add one additional chapter (see chapter 27 /the laws of 'erchin') immediately afterward?

In this week's shiur we attempt to explain why.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Let's begin by clarifying our opening question. Recall how Parshat Bechukotai (the last Parshat ha'shavua in Sefer Vayikra) contains two distinct sections:

- (1) the **tochacha** (chapter 26) -  
Bnei Yisrael's reward [and/or punishment] should they obey [/or disobey] God's commandments;
- (2) The laws of '**erchin**' (chapter 27) -  
A set of specific laws pertaining to the monetary evaluation of people or property dedicated to God.

Considering that Sefer Vayikra is a book that contains a collection of mitzvot, a '**tochacha**' would form an appropriate conclusion - for it outlines how God rewards (or punishes) Am Yisrael as a function of how they keep those mitzvot.

The first section of our shiur will explain how (and why) the **tochacha** should indeed be considered the conclusion of Sefer Vayikra. Afterward, we'll attempt to explain why the Torah may have 'added on' chapter 27 to form a significant 'epilogue'.

### **PART ONE - A PERFECT FINALE**

Recall our explanation of how Sefer Vayikra divides into two distinct sections:

- A) **Kedushat mishkan** - chapters 1 -> 17.  
focusing on laws pertaining to the mishkan, such as korbanot, tum'a & tahara, etc.
- B) **Kedushat ha-am ve-haaretz** - chapters 18 -> 25.  
focusing on a wide range of laws of 'kedusha' outside the mishkan, to make Am Yisrael an '**am kadosh**'.

As you review both the 'positive' and 'negative' sides of the **tochacha**, note how the reward and punishment relates to **both** these sections, i.e. the mishkan and the Land:

- \* On the positive side, should Bnei Yisrael **obey** the mitzvot, then:
  - B) "and I will put My **mishkan** in your midst..." (26:11)
  - A) "and the **land** shall give its produce..." (26:4).

- \* On the negative side, should Bnei Yisrael **disobey** these laws, then:
  - A) "I will make your **mikdash** desolate..." (26:31)
  - B) "the **land** will not give its produce..." (26:20,34-35).

This only strengthens our claim that the **tochacha** should have been the last chapter of Sefer Vayikra! However, the best 'proof' is found in its 'final' pasuk.

### **THE FINAL PASUK -**

Let's take a look at the final pasuk of the **tochacha**, to show how it relates to both halves of Sefer Vayikra:

"These are the **chukim & mishpatim**, and the **torot** which

God had given between Him and Bnei Yisrael on Har Sinai to Moshe" (26:46).

Clearly, this pasuk forms a summary of more than just the **tochacha** itself. Let's explain why.

Note how this final pasuk mentions two categories of mitzvot that we are already familiar with:

- 1) **chukim & mishpatim**, and
- 2) **torot**.

This implies that whatever **unit** this pasuk does summarize - it includes both 'chukim & mishpatim' **and** 'torot' (that were given to Moshe on Har Sinai). Hence, this pasuk must summarize more than the **tochacha**, for the **tochacha** itself does not contain "chukim & mishpatim", nor "torot".

Aware of this problem, many commentators attempt to identify the wider unit that is summarized in this pasuk.

For example:

\* Rashbam suggests that it summarizes both Parshiot Behar & Bechukotai, i.e. chapters 25 & 26. This is quite logical, for the laws of shmitta and yovel could be considered the "chukim & mishpatim". This also makes sense since both these chapters are included in the same 'dibbur' which began in 25:1.

However, Rashbam does not explain which laws in this unit fit under the category of torot.

Furthermore, recall our explanation in Parshat Tzav that a 'torah' implies a procedural type of law, e.g. 'torat ha-chatat' - how the kohen executes the chatat offering, etc. Within chapters 25 & 26, it is difficult to pinpoint any such 'procedural' law.

\* Ibn Ezra claims that this pasuk summarizes not only Parshat Behar (i.e. Vayikra chapters 25 & 26), but also Parshat Mishpatim, i.e. **Sefer Shmot** chapters 21 - 23!

Ibn Ezra's interpretation is based on his understanding that the **tochacha** in Parshat Bechukotai is none other than the 'sefer ha-brit' mentioned in Shmot 24:7 [i.e. in the Torah's description of the ceremony at Ma'amad Har Sinai when Bnei Yisrael proclaimed 'na'aseh ve-nishma']. (See Ibn Ezra on Vayikra 25:1 and Shmot 24:7.)

However, it seems rather strange to find a summary pasuk for Parshat Mishpatim at the end of Sefer Vayikra!

\* Ramban agrees with Ibn Ezra that this pasuk forms a summary of the mitzvot in Parshat Mishpatim as well. However, he reaches this conclusion from a different angle. Ramban claims that this parshia of the **tochacha** was actually given to Moshe Rabbeinu during his second set of forty days on Har Sinai, and serves as a 'replacement' covenant - to replace the conditions of the original na'aseh ve-nishma covenant (as described in Shmot 24:7). As such, this summary pasuk summarizes the mitzvot in Parshat Mishpatim as well. [See Ramban on 25:1, towards the end of his lengthy peirush to that pasuk. This complicated (but important) Ramban is based on his approach to the chronological order of Chumash, but it is beyond the scope of this shiur.]

In any case, our above question regarding Ibn Ezra's approach would apply to Ramban's as well.

\* Rashi offers the 'widest' understanding of this summary pasuk. He claims that this finale pasuk summarizes not only the entire 'written law' of the entire Chumash, but also the entire 'oral law' as well!

It is interesting to note that from among all of the commentators, only Rashi deals with the problem of determining the precise meaning of "torot". Rashi solves the problem by quoting the Midrash that it refers to 'Torah she-bikhtav u-ba'al peh'. However, this interpretation is quite difficult for (according to simple pshat) the word 'eileh' [these] at the beginning of 26:46 summarizes what has been **written** thus far, and not what has not been written yet.

\* Seforno follows a direction similar to Rashi, but appears to

be a bit more 'realistic'. He claims that this pasuk summarizes **all** of the mitzvot that were mentioned in Chumash thus far, i.e. **before** Parshat Bechukotai. However, Sefer is not very precise concerning exactly which mitzvot are summarized by this pasuk.

In our shiur, we will follow Sefer's 'lead' and show how this final pasuk may actually form a summary pasuk for all of the mitzvot found in Sefer Vayikra! Our approach will be based on identifying more specifically what the phrases chukim & mishpatim and torot (in 26:46) may be referring to.

## A FITTING FINALE

Recall once again how Sefer Vayikra divides into two sections (see above), and how the second half of the Sefer begins in chapter 18 with a set of five psukim that form an introduction. [See 18:1-5 and our shiur on Parshat Acharei Mot.]

As you review those psukim, note how these psukim actually introduce an entire set of chukim u-mishpatim. For example:

"Observe My **mishpatim** and keep My **chukim** to follow them, I am the Lord your God. Keep My **chukim** & **mishpatim**..." (18:4-5. See also 18:26-30!).

Therefore, the phrase chukim ve-mishpatim in our 'finale pasuk' (26:46) could be understood as the summary of the **second** half of Sefer Vayikra (chapters 18->25), as it refers to the numerous chukim u-mishpatim that are recorded in that section.

Furthermore, note how often we have found this phrase in the second half of Vayikra: see 19:19 & 37, 20:8 & 22, and 25:18!

In a similar manner, the word torot could be considered a summary of the laws found in the **first** half of the Sefer. Recall how the word torah was used numerous times to describe the various procedures regarding korbanot. The most obvious example would be Parshat Tzav where the phrase '**zot torat...**' introduced each category of korbanot (see 6:2, 6:7, 6:18, 7:1, 7:11) and also formed its summary (see 7:37!).

However, this phrase was also found numerous times in Parshat Tazria/Metzora as well (see 12:7, 13:59, 14:2,32,45; and 15:32).

Furthermore, even though this phrase is not mentioned by the other mitzvot in this section, most of its laws are of a procedural nature and could easily fall under this category of torot. Certainly, the seven day 'milu'im' & 'yom ha-shmini' ceremonies (chapters 8 & 9) are procedures and hence could be understood as torot, as is the yearly 'avoda' of the kohen gadol on Yom Kippur (see chapter 16).

Hence, the word torot in 26:46 can be understood as a summary of the procedural laws found in the **first** half of Sefer Vayikra.

Thus, the final pasuk of the tochacha (26:46) becomes an almost 'perfect ending' for the entire sefer:

"These are the **chukim** & **mishpatim** [summarizes the second half - chapters 18 thru 25] and the **torot** [summarizes the first half - chapters 6 thru 17] which God had given between Him and Bnei Yisrael on Har Sinai to Moshe" (26:46).

The phrase chukim & mishpatim summarizes Part Two of Sefer Vayikra, while the word torot summarizes Part One!

## THE TOCHACHA & SEFER SHMOT

Even though we have shown how this finale pasuk (26:46) forms a beautiful conclusion for Sefer Vayikra, it contains an additional phrase that explains why it could be considered a conclusion for the laws in **Sefer Shmot** as well. [If so, this would help us appreciate Ibn Ezra & Ramban's peirush as well, and the chiastic structure discussed in our shiur on Parshat Behar.]

Let's take a closer look at this finale pasuk, noting the second half of the pasuk:

"These are the chukim u-mishpatim, and the torot which God had given - **beino u-vein Bnei Yisrael** - between Himself and Bnei Yisrael, on **Har Sinai** through Moshe" (26:46).

This special phrase: 'beino u-vein Bnei Yisrael' may highlight the covenantal nature of the mitzvot of Sefer Vayikra. To explain why, we need only quote a pasuk that we are all familiar with from 'shabbos davening' [our sabbath prayers]. Note how the Torah uses an almost identical phrase as it describes how Shabbat should be considered a 'brit':

"Ve-shameru Bnei Yisrael et ha-shabbat... - to keep it as a day of rest for all generations - **brit olam** - an everlasting covenant - **beini u-vein Bnei Yisrael** - an eternal sign..." (see Shmot 31:16-17).

In fact, this very concept of brit is emphasized several times by the **tochacha** itself:

"... ve-hakimoti et **briti** itchem" (26:9)  
 "... lehafrechem et **briti**" (26:15)  
 "ve-zacharti et **briti** Yaakov ve-af et briti Yitzchak..." (26:42)  
 "ve-zacharti lahem **brit** rishonim asher hotzeiti..." (26:45).

If this interpretation is correct, then we have found an additional thematic connection between the laws of kedusha in Sefer Vayikra and the purpose of Matan Torah as described at **brit Har Sinai**. As we have explained, the mitzvot of Sefer Vayikra function as a vehicle thru which the goal of **brit Sinai** - "ve-atem tiheyu li mamlechet kohanim ve-goy kadosh" - can be achieved. (See Shmot 19:4-6.)

[Once again, note how this thematic connection can also explain the chiastic structure that connected the laws in Sefer Shmot & Sefer Vayikra, as explained in our shiur on Parshat Behar.]

Hence, the phrase 'beino u-vein Bnei Yisrael' in this summary pasuk may emphasize how the mitzvot of Sefer Vayikra strengthen the covenant between God and Bnei Yisrael, as forged at Har Sinai, where Am Yisrael took upon themselves to become God's special nation.

## THE TOCHACHA & SEFER BREISHIT

Thus far, we have shown how the **tochacha** forms a fitting conclusion for Sefer Vayikra, and thematically relates back to covenant at Har Sinai as described in Sefer Shmot. One could suggest that it may contain a certain element that thematically returns us to Sefer Breishit as well.

Recall our explanation of how Gan Eden represented an ideal environment in which man was capable of developing a close relationship with God. In that environment, man's reward for obeying God was a prosperous life in Gan Eden; while his punishment for disobeying God's commandment was death - i.e. his banishment from Gan Eden.

The two sides of the **tochacha** describe a similar environment for Am Yisrael living in Eretz Yisrael. Should they keep God's laws, Am Yisrael can enjoy a prosperous and secure existence in their land.

For example, 'im be-chukotai teilechu...', i.e. should you follow God's laws, then 've-achaltem le-sova be-artzechem' - you will enjoy prosperity in your land (see 25:3-6). - This would be in contrast to man's punishment when he was expelled from Gan Eden with the curse of 'be-ze'at apcha tochal lechem' (see Breishit 3:17-19).

Recall as well how God was 'mithalech' in Gan Eden (see Br.3:8). Similarly, He will now 'mithalech' in Eretz Yisrael together with His Nation: 'v'e-ithalachti betochachem, ve-hayiti lachem I-Elokim, ve-atem tihiyu li le-am' (see Vayikra 25:12).

On the other hand, should Bnei Yisrael not follow God's laws ('ve-im lo tishme'u..'), they will be faced with a troubled existence, culminating with their expulsion from the land (26:33), parallel to man's banishment from Gan Eden. (This parallel between Gan Eden and Eretz Yisrael was already introduced at the beginning of the second half of Sefer Vayikra- see 18:24-30).

[In this manner, the Midrashim that identify Gan Eden as Eretz Yisrael relate to more than its geographical location; rather they underscore a major biblical theme.]

## PARSHAT 'ERCHIN' - WHY HERE?

We return now to our original question. If the final pasuk of the **tochacha** forms such an appropriate ending for Sefer Vayikra, why does the Torah place 'parshat erchin' immediately afterward (instead of beforehand in Sefer Vayikra)? After all, the laws of erchin, especially those relating to **yovel** (see 27:16-25), would have fit nicely within Parshat Behar, together with the other laws relating to **yovel**. [See Ramban on 27:1]

Furthermore, the laws relating to the dedication of objects to the Temple treasury could have been included much earlier in Sefer Vayikra, possibly in Parshat Vayikra together with other laws concerning voluntary offerings.

The simplest explanation is that the Torah did not want to conclude the Sefer on a 'sour note', i.e. with the **tochacha**, preferring instead to conclude with something more positive.

[Sort of like adding on a 'happy ending' by selecting a 'parshia' that could have been recorded earlier, and saving it for the conclusion.]

The Ibn Ezra offers an explanation based on 'sod', relating to the deeper meaning of 'bechor' and 'ma'aser' (see last Ibn Ezra in Vayikra).

Seforno differentiates between these mitzvot (in chapter 27) that are voluntary, and the mandatory mitzvot summarized in 26:46. Because those mitzvot constituted the essence of the **brit**, they were summarized separately. Once those mitzvot were completed in chapter 26, chapter 27 records the mitzvot of Har Sinai that were not part of that covenant. (See Seforno 26:46.)

One could suggest an alternative approach, by considering once again the overall structure of Sefer Vayikra.

Recall from our study of Parshat Vayikra that the first five chapters (i.e. the laws of 'korban yachid') were given to Moshe Rabbeinu from the ohel mo'ed (see 1:1), while the next two chapters (the torot of the korbanot in chapter 6-7) were given from Har Sinai (see 7:37-38). Furthermore, since the laws of Parshat Vayikra were given from the ohel mo'ed, they must have been given only **after** the **shechina** had returned to the mishkan on the **yom ha-shmini**, and hence after the story of the seven day 'milu'im' & 'yom ha-shmini' - as recorded in Vayikra chapters 8-10.

Therefore, it appears as though the laws in Parshat Vayikra were placed intentionally at the beginning of Sefer Vayikra, even though they chronologically belong in the middle of the Sefer.

Thus, we conclude that even though both the opening and concluding units of Sefer Vayikra belong within the sefer, the Torah records them as a 'header' and 'footer' instead.

The following chart reviews this structure:

CHAPTERS	TOPIC
=====	=====
* HEADER	
1->5	the laws of korban yachid (mitzvot)
6->7	I. TOROT of: [first section]
8->10	- how to bring korbanot
11->15	- how the milu'im were offered
16->17	- yoledet, metzora, zav, zava
	- how to enter kodesh kodashim
18->20	II. CHUKIM U-MISHPATIM [second section]
21->22	- kedushat ha-am
23->25	- kedushat kohanim
26	- kedushat zman u-makom
	TOCHACHA (& summary pasuk/ 26:46)
* FOOTER	
27	the laws of erchin (mitzvot)

Now we must explain why specifically these two parshiot were chosen to serve as the 'book-ends' of Sefer Vayikra?

## SPECIAL 'BOOKENDS'

Parshat Vayikra and the parshia of erchin share a common

theme. They both deal with an individual dedicating an object to 'hekesh'. Both also begin with cases where a person offers a voluntary gift (nedava): Parshat Vayikra begins with **ola** & **shlamim** while parshat erchin begins with the voluntary offering of the value of a person, animal, or field.

[Vayikra deals with korbanot actually offered on the mizbeiah (kodshei mizbeiah) while **erchin** deals with the value of objects which cannot be offered, their value is given instead to the 'general fund' of the Temple - 'kodshei bedek ha-bayit'.]

One could suggest that the Torah intentionally chose parshiot dealing with the offerings of an individual, primarily the voluntary offerings, to form the 'book-ends' of Sefer Vayikra for the following reason.

As we have seen, Sefer Vayikra focuses on the kedusha of the **mishkan** and of the **nation**. These lofty goals of the **Shchina** dwelling upon an entire nation can easily lead the individual to underestimate his own importance. Furthermore, the rigid detail of the mitzvot of Vayikra may lead one to believe that there is little room for self-initiated expression in his own relationship with God, as our covenantal obligations could be viewed as dry and technical.

To counter these possible misconceptions, the Torah may have placed these two parshiot at the opening and concluding sections of Sefer Vayikra - to stress these two important tenets of 'avodat Hashem'. Despite the centrality of the community, the individual cannot lose sight of the value and importance of his role as an integral part of the communal whole. Secondly, the rigidity of Halacha should not stifle personal expression. Rather, it should form the solid base from which the individual can develop an aspiring, dynamic, and personal relationship with God.

shabbat shalom  
menachem

## ===== FOR FURTHER IYUN

A. It should be noted that Abarbanel does raise this possibility that the final pasuk of the **tochacha** summarizes only chapter 26, and not larger unit. Note how this forces him to explain the phrases **chukim u-mishpatim** & **torot** in a very different manner.

## B. WHEN WERE THE MITZVOT OF SEFER VAYIKRA GIVEN?

In our shiur, we explained that the **torot** mentioned in Parshat Tzav were given on Har Sinai. How about the **torot** in Tazria Metzora, or basically, how about the rest of the mitzvot of Sefer Vayikra - were they given from the ohel mo'ed or earlier when Moshe was on Har Sinai? The psukim do not tell us.

Based on the above shiur, we can suggest that most **all** of the mitzvot in Vayikra were actually given on Har Sinai, but are recorded in Sefer Vayikra for simply thematic reasons (i.e. 'torat kohanim'). Surely, Parshat Tzav states explicitly that its **torot** were given to Moshe on Har Sinai (7:37-8).

Therefore one can also assume that all of the **torot** mentioned in the Sefer were given on Har Sinai. In fact, this can explain Shmot 24:12 which states that Moshe went up to Har Sinai to receive the **torah** & **mitzva** - one could suggest that the **mitzva** refers to the laws of the **mishkan** which Moshe is about to receive that are recorded in the remainder of Sefer Shmot (see Shmot 25:1-4!). If so, then **torah** may refer to the **torot** (that relate to the **mishkan**). However, most of these **torot** are recorded in Sefer Vayikra and not in Sefer Shmot.

[**ha-torah** may also refer to the mitzvot of Sefer Devarim, but that is a topic for a different shiur. [note Devarim 1:5 and the word **torah** throughout that Sefer.]

In a similar manner one could understand that the **chukim u-mishpatim** recorded in Sefer Vayikra may also have been given to Moshe on Har Sinai. To support this, see Devarim 5:28 and its context, as well as Shmot 24:1-4.

Therefore the mention of Har Sinai in this final pasuk does not limit its interpretation to referring only to Behar/Bechukotai, rather strengthens its interpretation as a summary of the entire Sefer. It is also likely that certain other mitzvot that were given in reaction to events that occurred after 'hakamat ha-mishkan', i.e.

after Nadav and Avihu died etc.) may have been given from the **ohel mo'ed**, but there is no reason why we cannot understand that all the other mitzvot recorded in the sefer were first given to Moshe during his 40 days on Har Sinai. Except of course those mitzvot that were given directly to Aharon, which indicate that they were given from the **ohel mo'ed**, and the mitzvot that were given in response to a question that Moshe did not have the answer for.

#### C. A CHIASTIC STRUCTURE WITHIN SEFER VAYIKRA

In the above shiur, we have noted a connection between the opening and closing parshiot of Sefer Vayikra. This suggests a possibility of a chiastic structure within Sefer Vayikra itself. See if you can find this structure, noting how chapters 18 and 20 'surround' chapter 19, the connection between chapter 21 and chapter 16 in relation to the kohen gadol, chapters 22 and 11-15 in relation to **tum'a & tahara**, chapters 9-10 to chapter 23 in relation to cycles of 7 & 8, chapter 24 and chapter 8 in relation to the keilim of the mishkan, and chapters 6-7 and chapters 25-26 in relations to mitzvot given at **Har Sinai** (see finale psukim of both sections), 've-akmal'!

#### D. THE VALUE OF THE INDIVIDUAL

As we explained above, the "tochacha" in Parsha Bechukotei (chapter 26) would have been a most fitting conclusion for Sefer Vayikra. Nonetheless, Sefer Vayikra adds one additional chapter, detailing the laws of "erchin" - i.e. the 'monetary' assessment of various individuals - should their value be dedicated to God.

Even though these laws seem to be rather technical, from a certain perspective they do reflect the value of every individual. But what does that have to do with the conclusion of Sefer Vayikra? As Ramban points out (see middle of his commentary to 26:11), the "tochacha" describes 'reward and punishment' at the national level. In other words, it promises prosperity in relation to the land's agriculture, political stability, security, and military success (see 26:1-11). On the 'down side' - it describes primarily national calamities should Bnei Yisrael not keep God's laws. On the other hand, God does not promise every individual (in this world) reward for his good deeds, or punishment for his sins.

There may be some thematic logic behind this distinction. As Bnei Yisrael were chosen to be 'nation' that will represent God among the nations of the world, we are judged as a nation; and rewarded as a nation. If we are successful in making a 'Name for God' by keeping His mitzvot properly, God will not only 'dwell in midst' (see 26:11-12), He will also provide us with material reward - that enables the nation to continue 'the good job'. On the other hand, should we embarrass God by our poor behavior as His special nation, God promises to consistently punish us, to various levels, until we finally 'learn our lesson' (see 26:14-- or even without repentance, should our situation becomes too pitiful (see Devarim 32:36).

[To support this point, note the phrase "l'einei ha'goyim" - in the eyes of the nations -in the finale pasuk (see 26:45 in its context), emphasizing the connection between God's covenant with the people of Israel and their influence on the rest of mankind.]

This thematic conclusion, however accurate, can lead to a very dangerous conclusion. If God's primary interest with His people is at the national level, then maybe the fate of each individual may not so be important [ask the early leaders of communism (like Stalin), if you know your history].

One could suggest, that it may be specifically for this reason that Sefer Vayikra chose specifically the laws of "erchin" - reflecting the value of each individual - as its conclusion, to 'balance' this possible misunderstanding of the "tochacha". Surely, the primary focus of the Bible is on the existence of Am Yisrael as a nation, but to truly act as God's special nation - the importance of every individual must not be under-emphasized.

#### E. THE CONCLUSION OF VAYIKRA & SHAVUOT

As many commentators point out, the "tochacha" relates directly to the covenant between God and Bnei Yisrael at Har

Sinai. [Note the tell-tale phrase: "beini u'bein Bnei Yisrael b'Har Sinai" in its concluding pasuk (see 26:46), as well as the parallel pasuk at the conclusion of the "tochacha" in Devarim (see Devarim 28:69 - "milvad ha'brit asher karat item b'chorev"). See also Chizkuni on Shmot 24:7!]

Even though all the mitzvot of the Torah are important, it seems that certain mitzvot, i.e. mitzvot of Parshat Behar in Vayikra chapter 25, were singled out to be part of the 'official covenant.

[Note that all the psukim from 25:1 thru 26:46 form a single unit, as they are introduced by the same dibur.]

One could offer a very 'zionistic' explanation for this, as the laws in chapter 25 deal the "kedusha" of the Land of Israel in regard to keeping the laws of "shemitta" & "yovel" (see 25:1-13). In other words, one of God's primary considerations of how God will (or will not) punish us, depends on how meticulously we keep the laws of the "shemitta" year. [Note as well 26:34.]

On the other hand, chapter 25 contains much more than the 'technical' laws of "shemitta". If you read that chapter carefully, you'll note how its primary topic is the consequences of the laws of "shemitta" - reflecting the Torah's desire that Bnei Yisrael fulfill every aspect of the laws of social justice.

For example, as soon as we mention the laws of Yovel, the Torah immediately reminds us not to use those laws as 'technical loophole' to make a tricky 'real-estate deal' (see 25:14-17)!

Then, the Torah explains why these laws are so important, as God reminds us that our purpose as a nation is to be humble servants of God, rather than a group of wealthy landlords exploiting poor serfs (see 25:23-24).

The clincher of this direction are in the following thirty some psukim (see 25:25-55), which describe our communal obligation to help our neighbors in financial distress, by lending them resources so they won't need to either sell their land or even themselves!

Thus, even though the first thirteen psukim seem to describe the technical laws of "shemitta" & "yovel", the remaining forty some psukim focus primarily on assuring social justice for the poor and needy. In fact, by quoting the Torah's brief reference to the laws of "shemitta" in Parshat Mishpatim, we find that the very purpose of these 'technical laws' is to ensure social justice:

"Six years thou shall sow thy land, and gather its produce, but the seventh year thou shall let it rest and lie fallow, that the poor of thy people may eat..." (Shmot 23:10-11)

[Note as well how social justice was a primary theme in most of the laws of Parshat Mishpatim as well.]

To provide additional support, I'd like to suggest that the Torah's reminder to keep God's "chukim u'mishpatim" in 25:18 may not be referring to the laws of "shemitta" but rather to the laws of Vayikra chapters 18 & 19, for the simple reason that the opening psukim of chapter 18 introduce exactly what God's "chukim u'mishpatim" are all about (see related TSC shiur on Parshat Acharei Mot). For those who don't remember, the intro in Vayikra 18:1-5 leads us to the conclusion that God's "chukim u'mishpatim" are none other than the laws of Parshat "Kedoshim Tihyu" (i.e. Vayikra chapter 19)!

If these observations are correct, then the thrust of God's covenant with His people at Har Sinai, and especially His promise of reward (or punishment) should we keep (or not keep) His mitzvot, relates primarily to the ability of Bnei Yisrael to create a society characterized by acts of social justice ("tzedek u'mishpat" - see Breishit 18:17-19!), thus setting an example for other nations to learn from (see Devarim 4:5-8).

Should we emphasize this direction, as we meticulously keep all of God's mitzvot, may we be worthy of God's promise of:

"And I will give peace in the land, and ye shall lie down, and none shall make you afraid; and I will cause evil beasts to cease out of the land, neither shall the sword go through your land. And ye shall chase your enemies, and they shall fall before you by the sword... and your enemies shall fall before you by the sword. And I will have respect unto you, and make you fruitful, and multiply you; and will establish My covenant with you!" (see Vayikra 26:6-9)

## **PARSHAT BEHAR**

Shouldn't Parshat Behar 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 menorah (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 TIHYU"

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 TIHYU

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

## =====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 of 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

## **Parshas Behukotai: The Condition of the Blessing**

By Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

### **I. THE STRUCTURE OF THE BLESSING**

The first half of Parashat B'hukotai is made up of the promise of Divine blessing (if the B'nei Yisra'el observes all of God's commandments, 26:3-13) and the threat of Divine disfavor and curse (if they fail to do so – vv. 14-45). Although a complete analysis of both parts of this text is beyond the scope of this forum, we will try to present an analysis of the nature of the blessing:

- \* 3: If you walk in My statutes and observe My commandments and do them.
- \* 4: I will give you your rains in their season, and the land shall yield its produce, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit.
- \* 5: Your threshing shall overtake the vintage, and the vintage shall overtake the sowing; you shall eat your bread to the full, and live securely in your land.
- \* 6: And I will grant peace in the land, and you shall lie down, and no one shall make you afraid; I will remove dangerous animals from the land, and no sword shall go through your land.
- \* 7: You shall give chase to your enemies, and they shall fall before you by the sword.
- \* 8: Five of you shall give chase to a hundred, and a hundred of you shall give chase to ten thousand; your enemies shall fall before you by the sword.
- \* 9: I will look with favor upon you and make you fruitful and multiply you; and I will maintain My covenant with you.
- \* 10: You shall eat old grain long stored, and you shall have to clear out the old to make way for the new.
- \* 11: I will place My dwelling in your midst, and I shall not abhor you.
- \* 12: And I will walk among you, and will be your God, and you shall be my people.
- \* 13: I am Hashem your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be their slaves no more; I have broken the bars of your yoke and made you walk upright.

Let's examine the opening line – the condition of the blessing:

If you walk in My statutes and observe My commandments and do them.

All of the consequent blessings are contingent on our fulfilling this brief directive. What is the meaning of this Divine command, fulfillment of which carries so many wonderful blessings, such as peace, prosperity and national holiness?

Before moving on, there is an anomaly in the structure of the blessing section which calls for our attention. Note the table below:

Verse – Promise

3 – The Condition

4 – Bountiful Crops

5 – Plenty and Security

6 – Peace in the Land

## 7-8 – Military Success

9 – Fertility and Recovenanting (see Rashi and S'foro ad loc.)

10 – Bountiful Crops (again!)

11 – God's Sanctuary in our Midst

12 – God's Presence in our Midst

13 – Concluding Sentence

As can be seen, v. 9 is a natural conclusion; however, there are another four verses in the blessing. So, the second question is what we are to make of these two blessing-sections. If it were not for v. 10, which returns to the theme of agricultural success, it would have been simple to identify the first section as financial, political and military success; the second could be tagged as spiritual excellence. The inclusion of v. 10, *va'Akhaltem Yashan Noshan, v'Yashan miP'nei Hadash Totzi'u* – (you shall eat old grain long stored and you shall have to clear out the old to make room for the new) makes this division untenable. Is there some other way to divide the blessings – or can we reorient our understanding of either v. 10 or v. 9 (the first “conclusion”) that will help our understanding of this section?

Our final question is more fundamental to the nature of the blessing: Aren't we taught that we should perform Mitzvot because we were so commanded – or because they represent the most noble “life-style”? Why does the Torah present this list of agricultural, political, military and spiritual “rewards” for doing that which we are otherwise obligated to do?

In order to address these questions, let's return to the first verse and the seeming redundancy. We will find two approaches among the Rishonim which, if taken together, will be the key to understanding this blessing.

## II. UNDERSTANDING THE CONDITION

### RASHI'S APPROACH: “AMELIM BATORAH”

Rashi, following the *Torat Kohanim*, addresses the seeming redundancy in the first verse: “If you walk in My statutes: I might think that this refers to fulfillment of Mitzvot; but when it says And observe My Mitzvot, observance of Mitzvot is already stated. If so, how do I understand If you walk in My statutes? that you should be laboriously engaged in Torah study. (*sheTih'yu 'Amelim baTorah*”.)

In other words, Rashi understands the condition which we must fulfill as made up of two components: We have to observe the Mitzvot and we must also be ‘Amelim baTorah – laboring in Torah study.

### S'FORNO'S APPROACH: “USH'MARTEM ZU MISHNAH”

R. Ovadia S'foro, bothered by the same redundancy, arrives at a similar conclusion – but from an opposite textual direction. He understands that “walking in My statutes” refers to the performance of Mitzvot – and that “*Mitzvotai Tishmoru*” refers to study. He bases this on the statement in the *Sifri*: *uSh'martem – zu Mishnah* (“observing” refers to learning). (*Sifri R'eh* #6)

In summary, Rashi and S'foro both understand that the blessings will only be fulfilled when and if the *B'nei Yisra'el* accomplish both performance of Mitzvot and Torah study. What, then, is their bone of contention – what underscores their different textual derivation?

## III. ENGAGED ACTION

Both Rashi and S'foro are addressing the issue of cognitive awareness in the performance of Mitzvot. Rashi sees the mode of performance which will ensure these blessings as “intellectually engaged action”. Although a person may properly fulfill a Mitzvah while only being familiar with the operative details – e.g. how to hold the *Lulav* with the other three species, how much *Tzedakah* to give – someone who is intellectually engaged in the details, concepts and import of a particular Mitzvah will have a greatly enhanced experience when performing that Mitzvah. To that end, Rashi reads the first phrase of

the verse as referring to “laborious Torah study” – the hard work which goes into clarifying Halakhic concepts, analyzing various approaches and formulae etc. With that level of involvement, the performance which follows reflects a total involvement – i.e. loving God with all of the heart.

## INTEGRATED ACTION

S'foro accentuates a different component of the cognitive perspective in Mitzvah-observance. He picks up the process where Rashi left off – with the performance of Mitzvot which is enhanced with intellectual involvement. S'foro raises the bar to a new level – not only must we come to the performance of Mitzvot armed with our own cognitive involvement; we must maintain that level of awareness while we are engaged in the performance. That is why S'foro emphasizes the “guarding = learning” equation – holding onto that which we have learned while performing, avoiding the all-too-common dichotomy of knowledge and action which, although consistent with each other, are often relegated to different times and settings.

Both of these Rishonim understand that in order for us to receive the blessings which follow, we must achieve a level of observance of Mitzvot which includes an investment of learning and attaching that intellection with the action implied therein. In order to understand this demand, let's address the other two questions.

## IV. YASHAN NOSHAN

As mentioned above, we were promised that we would have a bountiful harvest (vv. 4-5); the sequence from there on seems to spiral “upward”, to political security, military success and spiritual fulfillment. Why does the Torah “jump back” to the agricultural theme in v. 10? (You shall eat old grain long stored, and you shall have to clear out the old to make way for the new.)

If we look at the previous verse (the “first conclusion”, v. 9), we can see a subtle shift in the focus and nature of the blessing. Up until this point, we have been promised many blessings – and now God promises that He will turn to us and fulfill His covenant with us. Which covenant is meant here?

As Ibn Ezra points out, we might posit that the earlier part of the verse, the promise of fertility, is the “covenant” association – a fulfillment of the covenant with Avraham that we would be as numerous as the stars in the sky. There is, however, another critical component of the B'rit Avraham which may be the stress and shift here.

When Avraham was first commanded to go to the Land, God told him that he would be a source of blessing for all people. This promise was repeated at the Akedah – the concluding narrative of Avraham's life. Along with the Land and numerous descendants, God promised that Avraham's “all nations of the earth will be blessed through your seed” (B'resheet 22:18). In other words, all peoples would eventually come to know God and recognize His authority through the progeny of Avraham. This may be the covenant which God promises that He will establish with us in v. 9 – that we will be enabled to realize our goal and role a “Light unto the nations”. The question is then raised: If we are indeed all together in our Land, living a blessed and righteous national life, how will the nations of the world “take notice” of us?

## V. MAKING ROOM FOR THE GRAIN

The answer, counterintuitively, is to be found in the realm of commerce. Let's take a fresh look at v. 10: You shall eat old grain long stored and you shall have to Totzi'u the old to make room for the new. The phrase Totzi'u can alternatively be translated as “clear out”, as above; or as “export”, as S'foro renders it. As he explains, we will have so much grain that we will be able to safely export to other nations. By engaging in commerce with other nations, two things will become readily apparent:

- 1) We have been generously blessed by our Creator – indicating Divine favor; and
- 2) Our behavior, specifically in the realm of interpersonal relations and business ethics, is of the highest standard.

Remember, this entire blessing is contingent on our integrating serious Torah study into our behavior. Certainly someone who studies Hoshen Mishpat (the section of Halakhah dealing with civil and criminal law) before getting involved in the world of commerce (Rashi) and who endeavors to internalize the sensitivities of that law into his business dealings (S'foro) will serve as an ethical beacon for others. Imagine an entire nation behaving like that!

We can now understand the continuum of the blessing. Subsequent to our own development as a strong and secure nation (see below), the Torah promises us that the covenant – of our being a blessing to the nations of the world – will be fulfilled **WITH US**. In other words, instead of this covenant being a *B'rit Avot*, which is operative even if we fail in our tasks, the covenant will be directly with us – in our own merit. That blessing will be enabled first by developing an association with other nations – through the commerce of exporting the goods of the Land.

## **VI. AND ONCE WE HAVE SUCCEEDED...**

From this verse on, where we would reasonably have the concern that once we have drawn the nations of the world to us and they have rallied around the cry “Let us go up to the mountain of the House of God, that He will instruct us of His ways...”

Therefore, the next few verses promise us that our special relationship with God will not only be maintained – but that it will be intensified, hinting at a return to the intimate relationship enjoyed by Man and God in the Garden of Eden (“I will walk among you”; compare with *B'resheet* 3:8.)

This also explains why these “rewards” are necessary. In order for us to make our impression on the nations of the world, giving us the opportunity to teach, we must have our own stable, safe and economically sound nation. It is hard to develop a holy nation when the threat of war or hunger is constantly over our head; God’s blessings insure that we can more easily fulfill our task and lead the world to a full awareness of the Creator and His moral guidance.

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## 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 Vayikra) 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 Vayikra) 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'foro, 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 (Vayikra 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 Vayikra, 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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## Parshat Behar: Mitzvot of Shevi'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-kdishi] 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 KEDUSHAH (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.

## **KEDUSHAH 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--"hekadesh"--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 KEDUSHAH 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 returned 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 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