

On Thursday night we counted the 36th day of the Omer. Count the next number for Shabbat on Friday night

Potomac Torah Study Center

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Friday May 15 is Yom Yerushalayim

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.

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

May Hashem protect Israel and Jews everywhere. May Hashem's protection shine on all of Israel, the IDF, and Jews throughout the world. We mourn those of our people who have perished since attacks have resumed. May the IDF and the U.S. soon force Iran to seek peace, and may a new era bring security and rebuilding for both Israel and all others who genuinely seek peace.

As I write in the late afternoon on Thursday, 20 Iyar, it is the 3337th anniversary of the day when our ancestors left the base of Har Sinai to resume their journey to the land that God had promised to our ancestors. This day always comes two weeks before the end of Sefira, and thus a bit more than two weeks before Shavuot.

The period between Pesach (the start of our freedom as a nation) and the Revelation (the day that became Shavuot) was supposed to be a joyous period for Jews. Pesach celebrates the Exodus, the beginning of our freedom as a people, and the Revelation celebrates our receiving the Torah, thus becoming truly free to dedicate our lives to Hashem's mitzvot.

This period, however, has become a season of mourning. During the first 32 days of Sefira, 12,000 pairs of Rabbinic students of Rabbi Akiva died of a plague, thought to be diphtheria (Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander). Our sages claim that these scholars, the brightest students of their time, died because they did not treat each other with proper respect. (The plague ended on the 33rd day, Lag B'Omer.) During the Crusades, non-Jews in Europe burned many holy Jewish books and murdered countless Jews throughout Europe, especially during this period of early spring. During the Holocaust, the Warsaw uprising and Nazi murders of the people locked in the ghetto took place starting at the beginning of Pesach – and therefore continued for weeks during Sefira. During this period, we refrain from having weddings, shaving, taking haircuts, and attending live music for a period of 33 days. (Most commonly until Lag B'omer, a day when rejoicing is permitted. Some have a tradition of also permitting exceptions on Rosh Hodesh Iyar, and even those who observe Sefira during the last 33 days permit exceptions starting with Rosh Hodesh Sivan.)

The depressing events continue during Sefira during our times. One year ago on the evening of 24 Iyar, a thug shot and murdered Yaron Lischinsky and Sarah Milgrim, two Israeli Embassy staff members (recently engaged to be married), in front of the Washington, DC Capital Jewish Museum. During the past five weeks of Sefira, Iran and Hezbollah have been sending many thousands of weapons into Israel, and anti-Semites have been attacking Jews violently in many parts of the world. While some governments have tried to protect Jews, many universities even in the United States have permitted violent demonstrations, and police in some countries (such as the United Kingdom) have not done anything to prevent violence against Jews and their property. Even in 2026, the period of Sefira remains a period of mourning.

Peter Himmelman reviews Rachel Goldberg-Polun's speech about her efforts to save her son Hersh and her amazing dedication to bring his legacy, and that of so many other victims of the Gaza horrors. The vicious attack in October 2023 and the monstrous horrors from Hamas since then show the worst of our enemies since the Nazis. How does one react to

such evil? Rachel Goldberg-Polun has dedicated her life since then to turning evil into a force to create a better world for those of us who have survived since then. The Torah mandates that we be Kadosh because Hashem is Kadosh – and that is a large part of her message to all of us.

Rabbi Brander agrees that we should react as Jews and remain Kadosh even as we respond to attacks. Rabbi Brander notes too many incidents of Jews oppressing non-Jews in Israel, especially in disputed areas (Old City of Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria). As he states, immoral conduct can undo even the most elevated spiritual aspirations – one of the lessons of Rabbi Akiva's students. Rabbi Sacks gives a similar message. Remarking why the Tochacha is so much longer than the blessings, he reminds us that God forgives our sins – but only if we acknowledge our sins, express remorse, make restitution, and repent. God does not forgive sinners who do not repent, because rewarding sinners would encourage more sin and make the world a worse place.

Rabbi Gurkow's lesson from Entebbe fits perfectly. He quotes the Rebbe: "A Jew is never alone – a Jew is always with G-d."

My beloved Rebbe loved visiting Israel, a trip he made twice a year for many years. His parents retired to Israel, and his sister and brother-in-law made aliyah early enough to raise their children as Israelis. My wife and I hope to take our children and their families to Israel for two weeks shortly after Tisha B'Av. We want our grandchildren to see why we love Israel so much – and to live for a time in a Jewish land where we can live Hashem's mitzvot and experience the land that He gave to our people.

Shabbat Shalom,

Alan & Hannah

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

Please daven for a Refuah Shleimah for Velvel David ben Sarah Rachel; Moshe Aaron ben Leah Beilah (badly wounded in battle in Gaza but slowly recovering), Daniel Yitzchak Meir HaLevy ben Ruth; Avram David ben Zeezi Esther; Ariah Ben Sarah, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Reuven ben Basha Chaya Zlata Lana, Avraham ben Gavriela, Mordechai ben Chaya, David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha; Miriam Bat Leah; Rena Michal bat Sara, Yehudit Leah bas Hannah Feiga; Miriam bat Esha, Chana bat Sarah; Raizel bat Rut; Rena bat Ilsa, Riva Golda bat Leah, Sharon bat Sarah, Kayla bat Ester, and Malka bat Simcha, and all our fellow Jews in danger in and near Israel. Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

Haftarat Parshat Behar Bechukotai: Being Worthy of the Gift

By Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander *
President and Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone

Rabbi Brander dedicates his Dvar Haftarah this week to the heroic soldiers, security forces and first responders of the IDF, defenders of the Jewish people and the land of Israel, and the United States Armed Forces, defenders of liberty and justice for all. May Hashem protect them and bring them all home speedily and safely.

Each year, in the days leading up to Yom Yerushalayim, we witness something remarkable. Thousands of young people make their way to Jerusalem for a Shabbat of *daglanut*, gathering and dancing with Israeli flags as they enter the Old City to celebrate its return to Jewish sovereignty. It is one of the most stirring expressions of our time: young Jews, united in

their love of Jerusalem, ascending to the city that has stood at the center of Jewish prayer and longing for millennia.

The haftarah for Parshat Behar-Bechukotai, from the book of Yirmiyahu, speaks to this moment in an oblique but powerful way. The prophet turns his gaze toward Jerusalem as the seat of the Divine Presence on earth: *"Like the throne of glory, elevated from the beginning, so is the place of our Temple"* (Jeremiah 17:12). It is a verse of extraordinary dignity and love.

Yet alongside this vision, Yirmiyahu's message also delivers a sober warning. The land and the city so precious to us are not ours by inherent right. They are contingent on our own behavior and moral worthiness. *"You will forfeit, by your own fault, the heritage which I have given you"* (v. 4), the prophet warns, adding that if the covenant is broken, it leads to exile. Israel and Jerusalem have been entrusted to us, but we must act with moral responsibility in order to remain worthy of them.

This juxtaposition of praise and warning is not merely a literary structure. It is a challenge to every generation, including our own. On Yom Yerushalayim, we celebrate, as we should. The return of Jerusalem to the Jewish people since 1967 is a modern miracle, one that continues to move anyone who takes seriously the sweep of Jewish history and the depth of Jewish prayer. But the question Yirmiyahu places before us is: are we acting as worthy stewards of this gift?

It is a question that becomes more difficult in moments when joy feels compromised. We don't need to look further than this week's news for examples of individuals outwardly identifying with religious Judaism who act in ways that distort its moral core. For example, an unprovoked attack on a nun walking down the street, or past instances of Yom Yerushalayim celebrants marching to the Western Wall in the Old City, harassing Arab shopkeepers and residents, causing fear among children and families who live there. These moments dare not be dismissed or ignored. They sit uncomfortably alongside the joy we feel, and they demand moral clarity.

Yirmiyahu understood that a nation's ability to remain in its land is not a matter of geopolitical strength alone. *"God searches out the heart and examines inner thoughts,"* he proclaims, *"so as to treat each person according to ...the fruits of his actions"* (v. 10). In other words: it is not about the flags we carry, the songs we sing, the passion with which we ascend to the Old City. It is about the *"fruit"* of our actions – the way we behave, how we treat the people around us. That is the measure by which we are judged.

In fact, the mourning practices that overlay Sefirat HaOmer, which we are still observing as we read this haftarah, were instituted in response to the tragic loss of Rabbi Akiva's students, whose greatness in Torah was overshadowed by a failure in mutual respect. Their story is a reminder that **even the most elevated spiritual aspirations can be undone by immoral conduct**. If this period of disrespectful behavior two millennia ago still casts a shadow over our calendar, it is because the lesson has yet to be fully absorbed. [emphasis added]

Jerusalem is a gift of incomprehensible magnitude. The sight of young people flooding its ancient streets – flags raised high, voices raised in song – stirs joy in our hearts. But Yirmiyahu calls us to something deeper than celebration alone. He demands a responsibility that makes the celebration meaningful.

As we conclude the book of Vayikra and its vision of a people living in harmony with God's Torah, as *"a kingdom of priests and a holy nation"* (Exodus 19:6), and as we prepare to mark Yom Yerushalayim, let us truly absorb the haftarah's dual message: the greatness of Jerusalem, and the weight of what it demands from those who enter it. That calling is renewed every time we pass through the gates of the city we love.

Shabbat Shalom

[Ed. note: from OTS: Among this year's overseas students at Midreshet Lindenbaum's Maria and Joel Finkle Overseas Program, 16 young women - 27% of the cohort - have chosen to remain in Israel next year to serve the country, whether in the IDF or National Service.]

* Ohr Torah Stone is a modern Orthodox group of 32 institutions and programs. Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Riskin is the Founding

Director, and Rabbi Dr. Brander is President and Rosh HaYeshiva. For more information or to support Ohr Torah Stone, contact ohrtorahstone@otsyny.org or 212-935-8672. **Donations to 49 West 45th Street #701, New York, NY 10036.**

<https://ots.org.il/haftarat-parshat-behar-bechukotai-rabbi-brander-5786/>

Lag Ba'omer reminds us to choose respect over division among Jews

By Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander *
President and Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone

[Ed. note: from Ohr Torah Stone on May 7: On Yom HaZikaron [April 19], students and staff across every school and program in the OTS network came together to honor the memory of our 69 fallen students, alumni, and faculty among Israel's soldiers and victims of terror.]

Lag B'Omer is a day of joy and relief, marking the moment when the students of Rabbi Akiva, who lived in the critical decades just after the destruction of the Temple, stopped dying from a plague. In many Jewish communities, it brings an end to our public mourning for these students, and ushers in a return to happiness, including the beginning of the wedding season.

But perhaps most critical is the cause of the tragedy itself. If we do not reflect on that root failure, we risk carrying it forward with us, even as we move toward Shavuot, a time of spiritual redemption for the Jewish people.

The Talmud refers to 12,000 pairs of Rabbi Akiva's students that perished of "askara," commonly understood as diphtheria, because they did not treat one another with respect. The sages saw a deeper meaning in the nature of the disease itself: an affliction of the throat, reflecting the toxic rhetoric of the students' disrespectful speech. These were not ordinary individuals; they were scholars studying under one of the greatest teachers in our tradition. And yet, their Torah learning and knowledge did not translate into the ability to honor one another.

That breakdown reshaped this period of the Jewish calendar. What should have been a continuous joyous journey from Passover to Shavuot, from redemption to revelation, instead became marked by mourning. It is a stark reminder that disrespect and division do not only harm individuals, they disrupt the moral and spiritual progress of an entire people. [emphasis added]

Today in Israel and across the Jewish world, we are seeing these same patterns play out once again. Conversations that should reflect shared purpose and mutual responsibility are instead breaking down into accusation and dismissal. Differences in background – secular, traditional, religious, national-religious, ultra-Orthodox – too often become lines of division, rather than sources of strength. Public discourse, particularly in the political arena, is marked less by principled disagreement and more by personal attack.

Of course, a healthy society depends on debate. Different communities have distinct needs and priorities, and the effort to balance them is a vital part of a functioning democracy. But beneath these differences must remain a deeper commitment: that we are part of a family, a single people, bound not only by shared history but by mutual responsibility. The words of Maj. (res.) Yossi Hershkovitz, of blessed memory, who fell in battle in Gaza, remain with me. The beloved Jerusalem high school principal and father of an Ohr Torah Stone student once implored:

"I have a personal request: do not speak badly about our fellow Jews. Don't say one bad word. There is no right-wing, no left-wing. No haredi. No 'other.' There are simply Jews."

The same obligation applies beyond our internal discourse, in our relationships and attitudes toward all human beings, created *b'tzelem Elokim* – in God's image. When Jews act in ways that degrade or harm those of our community or other faiths, it is not only a moral lapse, it is a betrayal of our deepest values. Recent incidents of Jews attacking other Jews, attacking Palestinians, and desecrating religious icons should trouble us all, regardless of our background or politics. We

cannot move meaningfully toward redemption while this remains our reality. We must be a people not only of shared fate, but of shared destiny.

Yet there is always room for optimism. Rabbi Akiva himself was able to move on despite the enormous loss of his students. He taught a new generation of Torah scholars, imbuing in them not only Torah knowledge, but the capacity to live with one another with respect. Renewal, in Rabbi Akiva's model, was not automatic. It required intentional change.

We see echoes of that possibility today. When I look at the extraordinary sacrifices and commitment of so many young Israelis from different backgrounds serving hundreds of days together in the army, and supporting families on the home front, I can see their deep sense of shared responsibility, and I am optimistic that our future will be brighter. But we must reexamine the way we think and talk about others, and those in leadership positions must reinforce this value in word and in practice.

Jewish law and tradition do not stand in tension with this goal; they enable it. Halakha contains both structure and sensitivity, principle and flexibility. Across biblical and rabbinic sources, the call to uphold the dignity of others – Jews and non-Jews alike – is profoundly documented.

No one exists in isolation. In Rabbinic literature, the description of Rabbi Akiva's students as 12,000 pairs – rather than simply 24,000 individuals – highlights that Torah was never meant to be a solitary pursuit. One cannot fulfill alone what Rabbi Akiva taught as a central principle: *'v'ahavta l'reacha kamocho,* 'love your neighbor as yourself. Such a commandment demands connection, encounter, mutual recognition, and respect. Torah is not only learned in the beit midrash; it is lived in the space between people. When that space breaks down, even the greatest scholarship cannot sustain the Torah's ultimate essence.

As we celebrate the joy of Lag B'Omer, we must do more than simply mark the end of the tragedy. Let us consider the kind of society that we are building in its aftermath, and ensure that it reflects the core Torah values we seek to uphold.

* From the Jerusalem Post (May 3, 2026).

<https://ots.org.il/jpost-lag-baomer-reminds-us-to-choose-respect-over-division-among-jews/>

Dvar Torah: Behar: Every Seventh Year (5767)

by Rabbi Label Lam

HASHEM spoke to Moshe on Mount Sinai, saying: *"Speak to the Children of Israel and say to them: When you come into the land that I give you, the land shall observe a Shabbos rest for HASHEM."* (Vayikra 25:1-2)

What is the subject of Shmitta doing in relation to Mount Sinai? Were not all the Mitzvos stated at Mount Sinai? Rather it is written here to teach that just as with Shmitta, its general rules and its details were stated at Mount Sinai, so too with all the Mitzvos that their general rules and their details were stated at Mount Sinai. (Rashi)

Rashi asks a great question. What is the connection between Mt. Sinai and the subject of Shmitta? He offers the answers that he offers but perhaps there are other approaches too.

Talk about taking a career risk. Moshe, who never stepped foot Eretz Yisrael, is promulgating laws that have to do with agriculture. That's not the risky part, yet.

Shmitta is a great idea, and for many reasons, it makes plenty of good sense. It's good for the long term production of the land to rest it from work every 7th year. The notion of a sabbatical has been adopted by the collegiate community. Professors too take a vacation for a year every 7th year. This certainly renews their vigor for academic rigor. I would welcome such an opportunity as would most of us.

Let's say, the government demands we all take a one year leave of absence every seventh year, but it is not a paid leave of absence. Super, but what would be the first question our spouses would ask? You got it! The Torah anticipated the same problem and it offers a definitive answer. *"And if you should say, 'What will we eat in the seventh year? We will not sow, and we will not gather in our produce!"*(Vayikra 25:20)

What would be a logical response? How can we carry this plan through successfully? There are a number of reasonable approaches.

1) How about saving up as Yosef managed in Egypt during the years of plenty. Let's create a savings plan so that we will have what to eat in the 7th year. That's not the answer the Torah gives though.

2) Let's try staggering the fallow years as universities do, and giving 1/7th of the staff off every 7th years. That way at least there is a strong and productive support system to carry those who are in the non-working mode. Sounds like a plan but that is not what the Torah says.

How does the Torah address this serious concern about Shmitta? *"[Know then, that] I will command My blessing for you in the sixth year, and it will yield produce for three years."* (Vayikra 25:21) Why 3 years? By not planting or harvesting the 7th year, the 8th year crop is also a forfeit. The problem is actually worse than we thought, but at least now we have a solution. It solves all the problems but one.

Who can make such a promise? Who can deliver on such a pledge? The other two were at least logical but this is absurdly risky. Moshe wants the Torah to be kept in perpetuity. If this is the plan, then he is taking a major career risk by advising everyone to be idle the same year and in the 6th year there will be a bumper crop, enough for 3 years, the 6th, 7th and 8th. How long would it take for Moshe and the entire Torah to lose credibility? Yes, 6 years!

If I was Moshe writing these laws by myself, I would be nervous. Only HASHEM can make such a guarantee and deliver. The laws of Shmitta give loads of credence to the Torah that was given at Mt. Sinai, that it was mandated by HASHEM and that would continually be affirmed over and over again **every 7th year**.

Good Shabbos!

<https://torah.org/torah-portion/dvartorah-5774-behar/>

A Society that Embodies the Principles of Shabbat

By Rabbi Dov Linzer*

Rosh Ha'Yeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah © 2013, 2019

This week, with the reading of Behar-Bichukotai, we end the book of Vayikra. The book of Vayikra is often thought of as devoted entirely to sacrifices or, a little more broadly, to the world of the kohanim – sacrifices and tumah vi'tahara, purity and impurity – and has thus also been called Torat Kohanim, the Torah of the Priests. However, this only described the first half of Vayikra. Beginning with Achrei Mot, the Torah turns to the lives of the entire people, and delineates the prohibitions of idolatry and forbidden sexual relationships, framed in terms of tumah and taharah.

This relocating of presumably Temple-centric concepts to the normal lives of the people is completed in the parasha of Kedoshim, where the entire people is called upon to be kadosh, to be holy just as God is holy. The concept of kedusha, we are told, is not limited to the Temple. It is a concept that must guide our lives in all its dimensions, and thus the parasha lays out a wide and diverse array of mitzvot for our lives outside of the Temple, mitzvot which allow us to achieve lives of kedusha. God had us build a Mishkan so that God could dwell in our midst, but the purpose of God dwelling in our midst is not to find God only in the Mishkan, but to take the encounter of God in the Mishkan, and to bring it out of the Mishkan and

into all aspects of our lives.

Until now, the life of kedusha outside the Temple is defined by a life of mitzvot observance in general, and of the observance of Shabbat in particular. Shabbat serves as the counterpart to Mikdash. Mikdash is the holiness of space, and Shabbat is holiness of time. Thus, Shabbat and Mikdash are regularly juxtaposed in the Torah. And of the two, it is the kedusha of Shabbat that is greater. Shabbat precedes Mikdash chronologically – it existed at the beginning of Creation and was commanded even before the revelation at Har Sinai – and its sanctity cannot be violated even for the sake of the construction of the Mikdash. One aspect of its greater importance undoubtedly lies in this – that the kedusha of Shabbat applies to all – men and women, kohanim and Yisraelim – and at all times and at all places. It is the regular, ongoing, experience of kedusha, of *veshakhanti bi'tokham*, of “I will dwell in their midst,” that exists in our lives.

Shabbat is kedusha outside of the Temple for the individual and the community, but it still falls short of a full life of kedusha. It is only in parashat Behar that the kedusha of Shabbat becomes the basis for structuring the entire society.

The mitzvah of *shmitta*, called here *Shi'vi'it*, the Seventh, is described in the opening section of the parasha as a “*Shabbat for the land*.” The Torah underscores this point, repeating the word “*shabbat*” seven (!) times in the opening section, and then commanding the mitzvah of the yovel, after seven cycles of *shmitta* – it is a Shabbat of the Shabbats.

The use of the term “*Shabbat*” for the Sabbatical Year demands attention. It is the concept of kedusha, the concept of Shabbat, applied to the land and to the entire existence of the people as a nation. The Torah spells out in Bichukotai the consequences for not observing the Shabbat of the land: destruction of the Temple and exile from the land. The loss of these two is effectively the destruction of us as a nation. And, indeed, for two thousand years, from the destruction of the Temple and the exile until the establishment of the modern State of Israel, we have ceased to exist as a nation. We continued to exist as a people, as a religion, but we were not a nation.

Shmitta, then, is kedusha applied on the national level; it is the structuring of our national identity on the principle of kedusha. What does that mean? The refrain of the Torah in our parsha is “*For the land is Mine, for you are strangers and sojourners with Me.*” (Vayikra 25:23). On the individual and communal level, the refrain from work one day a week, on Shabbat, structures our life so that it is not just about work, creating, and possessing. Our work takes place in a larger context, in a frame of kedusha, and it must serve a larger purpose. On the societal level, our refraining from working the land on year out of seven, on *Shmitta*, structures our society so that its goals and institutions are not – cannot – be about the acquisition of wealth and the exploiting of the land. [emphasis added]

A society that keeps the *shmitta* understands that the land is not the owner's to dispose of how they please, and works to protect its natural resources. A society that keeps the *Shmitta* understands that our energies cannot be devoted to the massing of unlimited wealth, for property will revert to its original owners every 50 years. A society that keeps the *Shmitta* understands that **other human beings are not put on Earth for us to maximally exploit them to our benefit, for humans are not made to serve others, but to serve God.** The mitzvot of lending without interest also appear in this parasha, because a society that keeps these laws understands that our money is given to us not for our enrichment at the expense of others, but that our money, our wealth, and the land itself is given to us by God to serve God and to help people. A society that keeps *Shmitta* understands that everyone must be cared for, that everyone lives and thrives: “*And you will strengthen him – the stranger and the sojourner – and he will live with you*” (Vayikra 25:35). Such a society structures its goals and institutions so that what it values is not wealth and possessions, but serving others and serving God. [emphasis added]

Until now, we as a people have done very well in the observance of Shabbat and mitzvot. We have done less well in living lives of kedusha. Our lives of mitzvot often are ones of technical observance, and we lost sight of the values that underlie the mitzvot. We keep the Shabbat meticulously, but this often does not translate into a reframing of our working lives in a way that they serve a higher purpose. And, most significantly, we have never really structured a society around the principles of *Shmitta*. In short, we have never given *Shmitta* a chance. What would it mean to structure a society around principles and goals that are profoundly different from those of the society in which we live, in which we have always lived? What would it mean if our financial, industrial, legal, and commercial institutions were structured around the principles of *Shmitta*?

It is hard to imagine how we can begin to realize such a restructuring of society, but there are places we can start. Not,

perhaps, in our secular institutions, but in our Jewish ones. Over 100 years ago, one of the most important institutions for the immigrant Jewish communities in the United States was the Hebrew Free Loan Society. Built on the principles of our parasha, this institution realized the primary responsibility of the Jewish community to support its members, and to do so in ways that made them productive members of society. Through its membership-based structure, the reciprocity that it engendered, and the embracing of the value of communal responsibility, not only were individuals helped, but the entire community was strengthened. Today, we do not have such communal institutions. And often the communal religious institutions that we do have – synagogues and Jewish schools – more buy into the values of academic achievement, professional achievement, earning potential, and amassed wealth – that are those of the secular society than they attempt to redirect our communal values to those of the Torah and those embodied by Shmitta.

On this Shabbat, let us think how in our individual lives we can bring the kedusha of Shabbat into the week, to structure our working week to serve a higher purpose. And let us think how we can bring the kedusha of Shi'vi'it into our society – how we can work without Jewish institutions so that they embrace and communicate the values of a society that serves a higher purpose, that reaches for kedusha.

Shabbat Shalom!

From my archives

The Weight of Words: Hearing Rachel Goldberg-Polin Speak

By Peter Himmelman *

There are times when we are struck by the simplest things: the shape of a tree, even one we've seen hundreds of times, or the sound of a bird in the morning as we wake. The one that's been chirping for months outside our bedroom window. And now, for some reason, on this particular day at this particular time, we detect something we hadn't stopped to consider. Or water, the very idea of water, which had become so common it no longer deserved a moment of our attention. Or words. How many words have we spoken or heard, read and forgotten, used to defend ourselves or to cheat others or to seduce or to betray, until at some point the words themselves seemed bereft of their ability to convey meaning?

Yesterday evening, my wife and I had come to hear Rachel Goldberg-Polin use her words.

Those simple things formed from the interaction of teeth and tongue, palate and lips, a strand of flesh vibrating somewhere in the back of the throat like the string of a guitar. Today, having heard Rachel's words, I have become once again astonished at their power, reawakened to their strangeness and to their potentially infinite value.

Rachel Goldberg-Polin, to remind you, is the mother of Hersh Goldberg-Polin, the young man taken captive by Hamas terrorists after his left arm was blown off below the elbow while attempting to throw a live grenade out of a roadside shelter packed with young people. "It was as big a space as my bathroom," Rachel said. He was held, tortured, starved and eventually murdered in cold blood along with five other captives in a tunnel beneath Gaza.

So you see, Rachel has not only words at her disposal, but a story to tell.

"My name is Rachel Goldberg," she said at the outset. "How many Rachel Goldbergs do you know?"

The crowd assembled at Stephen Wise Temple in Los Angeles laughed immediately. Every American Jew knows at least five or six Rachel Goldbergs.

Rachel has been lauded, rightly, by many people, and I count myself among them. "She is our hero." "A powerful force for good in a cruel world." "A mother to us all."

Yes. It does feel that way.

It feels, too, that **she resembles the biblical Rachel who waits by the roadside near Bethlehem, "weeping for her**

children,” refusing to be consoled. But I want to suggest something else besides these things, truthful though they are.
[emphasis added]

Rachel Goldberg-Polin is a Jew.

Not uniquely so. Not some alien creature dropped among us. Rather, she embodies something recognizable to Jews themselves: a particular fusion of sorrow, intellect, humor, argument, tenderness, endurance, memory and sanctification. What appears extraordinary to the outside world often feels strangely familiar to our own people.

Perhaps that gives some answer to those who are not Jewish and who may occasionally wonder — sometimes with admiration, sometimes with resentment — how a mere 15 million Jews in a world of 8 billion could have exerted such disproportionate influence upon civilization, or how, after the horrors of the Shoah, after a third of the Jewish people had been annihilated in crematoria and ravines across Europe, the Jews could build again: families, schools, books, orchestras, laboratories and, finally, the State of Israel itself.

Rachel is not the answer to that question. She is an exemplar of it.

The unelected — except perhaps through God — bearer of an ancient disposition: the wrestler. The one who wrestles between the temporal and the eternal, between despair and meaning, between unbearable grief and an insistence upon the sanctity of life itself.

Rachel did not sing or dance. There were no special effects, no throbbing music to fill the spaces between sentences. She had words.

Words that, had I not been seated in public, might well have had me weeping aloud instead of quietly wiping tears with the back of my trembling hand. Words that spoke less of triumph than of brokenness. Words that told not only her story, but ours.

Words that alerted us once again to the wonder and fragility of life, to its beauty and to the mystery of its value.

A week or so ago, after reading a piece of mine about Rachel, Jon Polin wrote to tell me that years earlier he had attended several of my Chicago shows and had introduced Rachel to my music back then. Then he added something small, almost impossibly small in the face of everything their family has endured: had Hersh been born a girl, Raina — my daughter’s name, and the title of a song of mine Jon had heard in the early 1990s — was among the names they had considered.

Early on, Rachel described feeling as though she had left this world entirely after Hersh’s abduction and murder.

A friend was extremely helpful,” she said. “A Breslov Hasid — you know, long peyos, beard, the real deal — and also a psychiatrist with a medical degree from Brown ...”

Yes. Those are indeed the sorts of people one encounters in Jerusalem.

He did not attempt to coax her back down into ordinary language or refute her feeling of existing elsewhere.

“He told me,” Rachel said, “that I wasn’t entirely in this world anymore. That part of me was now in Olam Haba.”
[emphasis added]

At that moment, I gasped.

Literally. And held back tears with all my strength.

Because tears do not come only from sadness. They also come from hearing something that feels perilously close to truth, something so true that language itself begins to fail before it. It is often at that edge of inexpressibility that tears arrive.

What is Olam Haba?

It refers to the “World to Come,” the world beyond the one we presently inhabit, beyond the rote and the overly familiar, beyond the normal shapes of trees, the ordinary sounds of birds, the commonness of water — or even of words themselves.

“Grief is a badge we wear,” Rachel said. She made the point that it shows we know love, that we have loved deeply, that another person’s existence had become inseparable from our own.

This is not a healing balm. It does not eliminate pain. But perhaps, especially if one believes there is an order beyond this visible world, it offers some orientation within suffering. A sense that existence is not random, that there remains some force — however one defines it — that places us where we need to be when we need to be there.

“I hate that Hersh is not here,” Rachel said. “I hate it.”

And yet, through all her words — exceptionally articulate, exceptionally emotive, at times hilarious and unmistakably Jewish — she somehow reminded us that our task remains here, in this world, in this week, this morning, this very moment.

In the afterword, Jon Polin is given the final words. He describes being stopped on the street by a stranger a year after Hersh’s murder. The man pulled out his phone and showed Jon a photograph of Hersh.

“Every morning the first thing I see is this picture of Hersh,” the stranger told him, “and I start each day by asking myself what I can do today to be better, to make the world better.”

“What a legacy!” Jon writes.

Then, addressing his son directly:

“Hersh: I continue to love you every second and always will. May your memory be a revolution ... for good!”

My gratitude to Rachel, to her husband Jon Polin, whose quiet strength holds Rachel, lets her breathe, lets her speak, and to the Creator of the Universe for granting me, and you too, another day of life.

* From the Jewish Journal (Los Angeles), May 6, 2026. Peter Himmelman is a Grammy and Emmy nominated performer, songwriter, film composer, visual artist and award-winning author.

[Ed. note: I assume that virtually all Jews know one or more members of the Goldberg-Polin family and suffered with Rachel, Hersh, and the rest of the family during the awful days of Hersh’s kidnaping, torture, and finally murder. We stayed in New York for a few days with cousins of the Polin family in December 2023 – our very close personal friends. The story of their suffering and dedication to turn their experience into a force for good fits during Sefira, so I reprint it here.]

<https://jewishjournal.com/commentary/opinion/388532/the-weight-of-words-hearing-rachel-goldberg-polin-speak/>

Behar – Bechukotei: Yom Yerushalayim: Two Modes of Holiness

By Rabbi Ysoscher Katz *

This week’s Torah portion is Parshat Behar-Bechukotai, but in honor of next Thursday’s Yom Yerushalayim celebration, I want to share a reflection on this day, informed by Torah from the Baal Shem Tov and his disciples.

As we celebrate Yom Yerushalayim, we rightfully focus our attention on Jerusalem, this sacred city that stood at the center of Jewish yearning for millennia. We celebrate the stones, the gates, the layered history woven into its ancient walls, and the remnants of the Divine Presence, which tradition teaches never completely abandoned the city (Shemot Rabba 2:2). In the beautiful words of Maimonides (Beit HaBechirah 6:16):

"And why do I say that in the Temple and Jerusalem, the first sanctity sanctified it for the future [even after the destruction], while in the rest of the Land of Israel, regarding [the laws of] Shmita and tithes and similar things, it did not sanctify for the future? Because the sanctity of the Temple and Jerusalem is because of the Divine Presence, and the Divine Presence is never revoked... And the Sages said: Even though they are desolate [destroyed], they retain their sanctity." [ed. note: translated because of software problems with Hebrew text]

For Rambam, the original sanctity of Jerusalem and the Temple is eternal, precisely because the Divine Presence ("the Shechinah") never truly departs. Even when the city is desolate, its holiness remains intact.

Yet as I reflect on my own Zionism, which finds its deepest expression in the cultural and spiritual rebirth of our people, I find myself contemplating a duality that defines our modern experience. While the land is an essential aspect of our return, for me the deepest source of Israel's sacredness lies in its people. The land becomes the place in which a sacred people can once again create Torah, culture, language, and religious life.

With this in mind, I propose viewing Tel Aviv not as a secular rival to Jerusalem, but as a complementary capital, a necessary junior partner to Jerusalem's primary sanctity in the landscape of Jewish holiness. If our spiritual focus includes the creative rebirth of the Jewish people, then Tel Aviv, as a central hub of Israeli culture and innovation, provides a geographic anchor for this dimension of the Jewish soul. Thus, if Jerusalem is our religious capital, anchored in a glorious past, then Tel Aviv is our cultural capital, focused on the creative vitality of Jewish life in the present. Both cities are crucial to the Jewish narrative, but they tell different stories. Tel Aviv became one of the great stages upon which the modern Jewish story unfolded, while Jerusalem remains the theological center of Torat Yisrael. Although the narratives overlap and involve the same people, they present two distinct, yet equally vital, tales.

And perhaps the relationship between the two cities is ultimately one of mutual dependence. Tel Aviv needs Jerusalem so that creativity does not lose its moral and spiritual center. But Jerusalem also needs Tel Aviv, because Torah that is not carried into the fullness of lived human experience risks losing contact with the very human reality it seeks to sanctify.

This notion of parallel capitals is not a modern innovation; it is rooted in our tradition. Throughout our history, various locales have stood as spiritual counterparts to Jerusalem, offering different forms of connection. The Mishna in Tamid (3:8) tells us that the sounds and smells of the Temple service in Jerusalem, the flute, the song, and the incense, were heard and smelled all the way in Yericho. Ravad explains this unique phenomenon by noting that Yehoshua had specifically set Yericho aside as holy. As a "tithe" of the conquered land, Yericho became akin to Jerusalem. Therefore, it was the only place outside the city where the Temple's spiritual energy could be miraculously felt.

Similarly, Rambam teaches in Hilchot Sanhedrin (14:12) that after the Sanhedrin was exiled to ten locations, it ended in Tiberias, and it is from Tiberias that it will eventually return to the Temple. Sefer Kaftor VaFerach records a tradition that the resurrection of the dead will begin in Tiberias forty years before other places. For nearly a century, the eyes of pilgrims were turned toward Tzfat, the home of R. Joseph Karo, the Arizal, and many other halakhic and kabbalistic masters.

The significance of these historical "junior capitals," Yericho, Tiberias, and Tzfat, is that they establish a traditional precedent for complementary sanctity alongside Jerusalem's primary role. Each served as a unique satellite of holiness, channeling and extending dimensions of Jewish spiritual life beyond Jerusalem itself. Together, they demonstrate how secondary centers of holiness can support and deepen Jerusalem's religious centrality rather than compete with it.

This duality corresponds beautifully with Rambam's teaching on the mitzvah of Ahavat HaShem. Maimonides famously offers two distinct, yet seemingly independent, routes to achieving this love: through the devoted study of Torah, as detailed in Sefer HaMitzvot (Mitzvah 3), and through the contemplation of nature and the wisdom of creation, articulated in his Mishneh Torah (Yesodei HaTorah 2:2). Rather than functioning as competing systems, these two paths are complementary. One without the other offers only a partial encounter with the Divine. Together, they reflect the twin modes through which we encounter God: God as Lawgiver, manifested in the discipline of Halakha, and God as Creator, encountered through the expansiveness of creation and human creativity. Jerusalem, as the religious senior capital and anchor of the Law, embodies the former by providing the essential structure of our covenant; Tel Aviv, as the cultural junior

capital of modern Jewish expression, embodies the latter by providing the vibrant canvas upon which Jewish national rebirth unfolds.

A prominent trope in Chassidut teaches that true shlemut requires the integration of opposites. To love God with a “whole heart” (לכב רבבל) is to find Him both in the silent contemplation of the Western Wall and in the creative energy of a Tel Aviv gallery. To see these two cities as simply a contradiction is to miss a deeper truth: they are complementary in the profoundest sense, two paths toward the same ultimate end. On this Yom Yerushalayim, let us celebrate the totality of our rebirth, recognizing that our encounter with the Divine is deepened when we embrace both the covenantal memory of the past and the creative vitality of the present.

* Chair of the Talmud Department and the Director of the Lindenbaum Center for Halakhic Studies, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, Bronx, NY

<https://library.yctorah.org/2026/05/parshat-behar-bechukotei/> [note: includes Rambam’s original text]

Not Somebody Else! Us!: Thoughts for Shabbat Behar-Behukotai

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

This week’s Torah portion discusses the laws of the sabbatical year, when farmers must let their land lay fallow. This “rest” for the land is a demonstration that the land belongs to the Almighty, not to us, and that we depend on the Almighty for our sustenance. In relating the laws of the agricultural sabbatical, the Torah states: *“And if you will say, what shall we eat the seventh year? behold, we may not sow, nor gather in our increase?; then I will command My blessing upon you in the sixth year and it shall bring forth produce for the three years [sixth, seventh and eighth years]”* (Vayikra 25:20-21).

The *Me’am Lo’ez*, the classic Judeo-Spanish Torah commentary, wonders why the Torah presented this information in terms of a question and answer i.e. q: what will we eat if we can't engage in farm work? a: don't worry, God will provide extra on the sixth year. It could simply have stated: keep the laws of the sabbatical and God will provide abundant harvests on the sixth year, so that you will have enough food to carry you through the next few years. Why did the Torah record the question – what will we eat on the seventh year?

The *Me’am Lo’ez* suggests that the question – **what will we eat?** – is a reflection of our anxiety and concern. A moral lesson of the sabbatical year is that we are supposed to worry about our sustenance. Even if we normally have enough to eat, at least once in seven years we become deeply nervous that we might not have enough food. We are driven to ask: if we can't plant our crops, how are we going to feed ourselves and our families? That very question forces us into the existential understanding of what poverty is. **Although we might ask the question only once in a sabbatical cycle, poor people have to ask this question every day of their lives.** Each day, they wonder how they will provide food for themselves and their families. By making us ask the question and feeling the dread of impending hunger, the Torah teaches us to empathize with the constant plight of the poor. By feeling this dread ourselves, we will be better able to understand the predicament of those who lack their daily food, and we will be more compassionate in providing for them. [emphasis added]

It is a normal human tendency to assume that problems belong to “somebody else,” and that “somebody else” will solve them or deal with them in some way. The Torah challenges us to internalize problems of others, and take personal responsibility for helping make things better. If there are poor and oppressed people, we are not supposed to leave them to “somebody else,” but rather we need to feel their pain ourselves and see how we can help. We can empathize with them only if we actually feel their sufferings and anxieties in our own selves.

This is true not merely when it comes to empathizing with the poor, the downtrodden, the ill. It is true about social responsibility in general. People want there to be synagogues and schools, hospitals and medical research, social justice agencies etc. – but they sometimes think that these institutions will be maintained by “somebody else.” They do not assume personal responsibility for these institutions and causes.

If we want certain institutions and causes to be supported for the benefit of society – then we need to look in the mirror and realize that we are the ones who need to step forward. We need to feel a personal challenge and responsibility.

If we are to have a better world, it will come about through our own assumption of personal commitment, our own idealism, our own determination.

We cannot and should not assume that "somebody else" will take care of everything for us. The answer is not "somebody else." The answer is: us.

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<https://www.jewishideas.org/not-somebody-else-us-thoughts-shabbat-behar-behukotai>

Paired Perspectives on the Parashah: Behar Land, Cities, and the Illusion of Permanence

By Rabbi Hayyim Angel *

Parashat Behar presents a striking vision of property and ownership that challenges basic assumptions. Land in Israel may be sold — but never permanently. With the arrival of the Jubilee year, it returns to its ancestral owners: *"The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is Mine; for you are strangers and sojourners with Me"* (Leviticus 25:23). At the same time, however, the Torah makes a surprising exception: houses in walled cities may be sold permanently, without reversion in the Jubilee year (25:29–30).

The Torah's distinction between land and urban property reflects a deeper principle: land represents a divinely ordered reality that resists permanent human ownership, whereas cities represent human-created environments that lend themselves to the illusion of permanence.

The Land Belongs to God

At the heart of the Jubilee system lies a foundational principle: the land of Israel ultimately belongs to God. Israelites are not absolute owners of their land, but temporary stewards. The cyclical return of land in the Jubilee year serves as a constant reminder that no claim to permanence is final.

Ramban notes a practical dimension to this law. Agricultural land is tied to livelihood and inheritance; its permanent loss would uproot families across generations. By contrast, houses — especially in cities — are less essential to long-term identity. A person may sell one home and relocate without losing a fundamental connection to livelihood or inheritance.

Yet the distinction runs deeper than practicality. As Amnon Bazak observes, the Torah restores land to the divinely ordained order established at the time of Israel's settlement. Land reflects God's structure; it must periodically return to its original framework. Houses in cities, by contrast, are entirely human constructs — built, modified, and rebuilt according to changing needs. Their permanence is not anchored in divine order in the same way.

The Torah thus distinguishes between what is fundamentally given by God and what is primarily created by human beings. [emphasis added]

Three Models of Human Existence

This tension between divine order and human construction is already embedded in the earliest chapters of Genesis. The story of Cain and Abel introduces two archetypal modes of life: the farmer and the shepherd. Abel, the shepherd, lives lightly upon the land, moving with his flocks. Cain, the farmer, works the soil, cultivating and developing it.

After murdering his brother, Cain is condemned to a life of wandering, cut off from stable connection to the land. Yet his response is telling: he builds the first city, naming it after his son (Genesis 4:17). In doing so, he establishes a third model — urban life — defined not by dependence on the land, but by human construction and permanence.

We thus encounter three fundamental patterns of existence, each reflecting a different relationship between human beings, the land, and God. These three models — shepherd, farmer, and city-dweller — form a conceptual framework that will illuminate the laws of Behar.

- The shepherd, who lives with mobility and dependence, without fixed ownership;
- The farmer, who partners with the land through cultivation, yet is tempted to claim it as his own;
- The city-dweller, who constructs an environment increasingly independent of nature, fostering a sense of autonomy and permanence.

Each carries its own religious possibilities and dangers.

Egypt and the Culture of Permanence

These models help illuminate the Torah's portrayal of Egypt. Egyptian society is marked by an intense investment in permanence — monumental cities, pyramids, and elaborate preparations for the afterlife. It is a civilization that seeks to control time, nature, and even death itself.

Significantly, the Torah emphasizes that Egyptians despise shepherds (Genesis 46:34). When they enslave the Israelites, they compel them to build cities and work the land — imposing upon them a civilization rooted in control, production, and permanence.

In this light, Egypt represents more than political oppression. It embodies a worldview in which human beings seek to establish enduring structures that obscure dependence on God. Egypt represents the full development of the agricultural and urban impulses taken to their extreme. [emphasis added]

The Ambivalence of Agriculture

R. Samson Raphael Hirsch offers a nuanced analysis of these modes of life. Agriculture, he observes, has been the engine of human civilization. It demands strength, ingenuity, and sustained effort, driving technological and cultural development. At the same time, it fosters a powerful sense of ownership and control. The farmer is deeply tied to the land — dependent on it, yet tempted to view it as his own domain.

This dynamic can lead in opposite directions. Agriculture can elevate human society, but it can also degrade it, reducing people to laborers and enabling systems of domination and slavery. It may even give rise to forms of nature-worship, as the forces that govern agricultural success become objects of reverence.

The shepherd, by contrast, lacks the stability and sophistication of agricultural life. Yet this very detachment from land and property can foster humility and spiritual openness. It is no accident that the patriarchs, Moses, and David are all shepherds before assuming leadership.

The Torah does not idealize one model at the expense of the others. Rather, it recognizes their positive features alongside their spiritual risks.

Correcting the Illusion of Ownership

We can now understand why the Torah treats land and urban property differently. Land represents a divinely ordered reality that precedes human ownership and therefore cannot be held permanently; it must return to its original framework. Cities, by contrast, are primarily human constructions, shaped and reshaped over time, and therefore more readily subject to permanent transfer.

The laws of Behar emerge as a corrective to the risks inherent in agrarian and urban life. When Israel enters its land, it becomes an agricultural society, developing fields, building homes, and establishing communities. With this development comes the danger of forgetting that the land — and life itself — ultimately belongs to God.

Shemittah and Yovel — the Sabbatical and Jubilee years — address this danger directly. **By mandating periodic cessation of agricultural activity and the return of land to its original owners, the Torah disrupts the illusion of permanent human ownership. These institutions remind Israel that its prosperity is not self-generated, and that its relationship to the land is covenantal, not absolute.** [emphasis added]

Even the distinction between fields and walled cities reflects this tension. Fields revert, reaffirming divine ownership. Houses in cities may remain permanently sold, acknowledging the reality of human construction — but only within limits.

Cities in the Vision of Redemption

This ambivalence toward cities continues in prophetic literature. The prophet Zephaniah describes a purified people who live with simplicity and humility, while Micah speaks of the removal of fortified cities, which Radak interprets as a shift toward a more open and expansive mode of living (Micah 5:10; cf. Ketubot 110b).

Yet the prophet Isaiah offers a different vision. In his prophecy, Jerusalem becomes the religious center of the world, a city that draws all nations toward the service of God (Isaiah 2:2–4). Unlike the Tower of Babel — a human attempt to construct a self-sufficient world that excludes God — Jerusalem represents a sanctified city, one that integrates human society with divine purpose.

These contrasting visions reflect not a contradiction, but a productive tension. **The Torah does not reject the city; it seeks to transform it.** [emphasis added]

Conclusion: Living Without Illusions

The laws of Behar challenge a deeply ingrained human instinct: the desire for permanence. Whether through land, buildings, or institutions, people seek to establish lasting control over their environment. The Torah, however, insists that such control is always partial and provisional.

By distinguishing between land and urban property, instituting cycles of release and return, and embedding these laws within a broader vision of covenant, the Torah teaches that human beings must live in the world without mistaking it for ultimate reality.

Holiness in this context is not withdrawal from society, but a disciplined engagement with it — one that resists the illusion of absolute ownership and continually reorients life toward God.

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Faith and Freedom by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine*

May this Dvar Torah be a Zechus Refuah Shileima for Cholei Yisroel

The idea of having a day of rest is an important one. In Mitzrayim, even before the Torah was given, Moshe appealed to Paroh to allow the Jewish slaves to rest on the seventh day. The Medrash tells us that Moshe explained, “*If they have a day of rest, they will regain their strength and will serve you better.*” In contrast, as soon as the Jews started expressing thoughts of vision and freedom, Paroh responded with a directive to work them harder so they shouldn’t have time to think.

Shabbos is far more than a day of rest. Shabbos is a time of vision; it is a time to reconnect with the purpose of creation. It is a time when we shut down the hustle of our lives to recalibrate, reconnect with Torah, and our eternal values. Shabbos is a time for family, for community, and for self.

In this week’s Parsha, the concept of Shabbos is taken to a new level. Shemita, the Sabbatical year, is an entire year in which “Shabbos” is practiced by the farmer. It is a year which the farmer uses to reconnect with values and energize himself with his priorities. Although the Jewish farmer would certainly learn Torah daily, during Shemita, he could really engross himself and grow as a Jew in a phenomenal way.

The theme of Shemita is seen most clearly in the Mitzva of Yovel, the year following 7 cycles of Shemita. That fiftieth year was a year of national recalibration, in which people sold into servitude would be freed, and much land sold under financial stresses would return to its original owner. As the Torah states, “*Call freedom throughout the land!*” a phrase which has become well known because it was inscribed on the Liberty Bell. Yovel, which comes after the seven cycles of the seven-year Shemita cycle, produced a precious opportunity for a personal reset.

When I learned in Lakewood (BMG), I learned in a Beis Medrash known as Mizrach (East) which is a bit underground. An atomic clock was placed prominently, and it was expected to provide the time with great accuracy. As the months passed, the clock was found to be running noticeably slow. We were quite befuddled as to why this expensive clock was not keeping time properly, until someone pointed out that it was radio controlled. Since the room was somewhat underground, the clock was apparently not receiving the signal needed to keep accurate time. Indeed, when the clock was removed from the wall and carried outside, it immediately received the signal of the correct time. I watched as the clock’s hour and minute hands began to magically move quickly to adjust to the accurate time based on the radio signal it just received.

Sometimes in life we become quite busy with life. In fact, sometimes we associate busyness with productivity and fulfillment. Shabbos, like Shemita and Yovel, serve as an opportunity for us to reevaluate and to be more receptive to the radio signal of Torah. Questions about our values, discussions about soft skills and how we relate to people are treasured topics for Shabbos discussion.

Not long ago, I visited a baby store to buy a highchair. Since the last time I bought a highchair (about fifteen years earlier), everything had changed. The highchairs are high-tech, and much like ovens, they come with all kinds of gadgets and features. One of the most intriguing features was that one highchair had a sensor to detect when the baby was crying. Then, the highchair was programmed to play soothing music and even enter into a mode that provided a gentle rocking motion to calm the baby.

As I was admiring the features, a salesperson approached me and offered to assist. "Is there anything I can help you with," she asked. I said I was doing fine. Then, as an afterthought I asked her if she happened to know if any of these highchairs had a Sabbath mode to turn off the sensor and the music for Shabbos. She said she wasn't aware of that feature.

As I left the store with a simple highchair that my wife and I purchased, I thought to myself about the importance of having a Sabbath mode in life — Not only every fiftieth year, or every seventh year, but every week, on Shabbos. A Jew needs to be able to enter "Sabbath mode," to reconnect with what we treasure.

The recent times, since October 7, have been heavy ones for the Jewish people. First with tragedy, then with various forms of antisemitism. We sense that bad people are targeting us because we are special; as a nation we are looking to reconnect and find out what makes us special. One of the keys to self-discovery is to slow down the busyness of our lives and connect with the serenity of Shabbos. Shabbos is a day of rest, but it is so much more. As Moshe knew so many years before, the restful aspect of Shabbos could be used as an excuse to explain the importance of Shabbos. It is restful and it rejuvenates. More importantly, through that resting, Shabbos gives us the opportunity for vision. We get to ask ourselves: What role do we want family to play in our lives? What role does personal development play? What role does G-d and Torah play in our lives?

Shabbos is about being more than your job or your bank account. On Shabbos we are all princes and princesses regardless of our professions or incomes. Shabbos commemorates creation. It is about being a person, living in G-d's world, trying to be the best we can be.

For Family Discussion:

1. What does "Sabbath mode" look like in your life — what do you actually turn off, and what do you turn on?
2. The clock lost accuracy because it couldn't receive its signal. What is your "signal" — what keeps you calibrated to your values?

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 and www.teach613.org; his email is RMRhine@gmail.com.
For information or to join any Torah613 classes, or to help sponsor his Torah insights, contact Rabbi Rhine.

Bechukosai – The Treasure of Torah

By Rabbi Yehoshua Singer * (2022)

This week's Torah portion depicts two scenarios, one of national devotion to G-d and one of national rejection of G-d. We are given promises of a true Utopia should our nation serve G-d as one in the ultimate fashion. If we fail as one and make the ultimate mistake of rejecting G-d's Torah and even denying G-d Himself, we are warned of indescribable anguish, destruction and devastation. (See Ramba"n Vayikra 26:11)

The verse depicting our national acceptance and devotion to G-d states, "*If you will walk in My statutes and safeguard My mitzvos and do them.*" (Vayikra 26:3) The Torah seems to be giving three conditions for truly conducting ourselves as G-d's nation. We must walk in G-d's statutes, safeguard His mitzvos, and do them. What does the first clause of walking in G-d's statutes mean beyond safeguarding and keeping the mitzvos?

Rash"i quotes a Medrash that explains the first clause to mean that we must walk and engage in the statutes themselves; in

other words we first must engage and toil in Torah study. If we begin by devoting true effort in our Torah study, and then safeguard G-d's mitzvos being careful to understand them correctly, and then we do the mitzvos, this is the formula to truly be G-d's nation on earth. (Rash"i Vayikra 26:3-4)

Similarly, when the Torah describes the unfortunate converse, the Torah begins with two clauses, "*And if you will not listen to Me and will not do all of these mitzvos.*" (Vayikra 26:14) Here, too, Rash"i notes that the first clause seems superfluous. What does not listening to G-d mean beyond not fulfilling His mitzvos? Again, Rash"i explains that listening to G-d is referring to the step before action. Listening to G-d is referring to our commitment to pay attention to what G-d is telling us and "*to toil in Torah to know the explanations of the wise men.*" Rash"i continues and explains that this is the first step our nation took in turning away from G-d. If we don't care to listen to G-d and to toil to understand G-d's Torah as He intended, we set ourselves on a path leading to the complete rejection of G-d's Torah and ultimately even to the denial of G-d's existence. (Rash"i Vayikra 26:14-15) (Rash"i says this only applies if one is not toiling in Torah because they are rejecting G-d.)

Why is toiling in Torah study so central to our role as G-d's nation and our relationship with G-d? Why is it not enough for us to simply learn the basic laws and follow the mitzvos meticulously? What if one is naturally gifted and does not need great effort to understand deep concepts – why should they need to toil in their study?

Perhaps the true meaning and purpose of toiling in Torah can be found in the phrases the Torah uses to reference this effort – "*walk in My statutes*" and "*listen to Me.*" Torah is G-d's statutes – it is His Will and His plan for this world, how He wants to relate to us, and even how He wants us to relate to Him.

Rash"i is teaching us that the first step in our service of G-d is to truly "*listen to Him*" and really hear what He has to say. It is well known how difficult it is to truly listen to another human being, to truly hear the full scope of their perspective and truly understand where they are coming from. It takes much effort, practice and self-control to even begin to walk in another person's shoes. If this is true when it comes to understanding another human being, with whom we share so much in common, how much more must it be true of any effort to understand G-d's perspective? To "*walk in G-d's statutes*" and metaphorically try and in some small way walk in G-d's "shoes" is an extremely difficult task. We can only accomplish this task if we are ready to toil and truly give our mind and our hearts over to understanding what G-d is truly telling us.

Torah is our marriage contract with G-d, describing His perspective, and His hopes and dreams. As in any relationship, the first step is to devote ourselves to understanding that perspective and those hopes and dreams. By toiling in Torah, our efforts themselves become the foundation for our relationship with G-d.

Rash"i continues and explains that this is the first step our nation took in turning away from G-d. If we don't care to listen to G-d and to toil to understand G-d's Torah as He intended, we set ourselves on a path leading to the complete rejection of G-d's Torah and ultimately even to the denial of G-d's existence. (Rash"i Vayikra 26:14-15) (Rash"i says this only applies if one is not toiling in Torah because they are rejecting G-d.)

* Co-founder of the Rhode Island Torah Network in Providence, RI. Until recently, Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD., and then associated with the Savannah Kollel.

Give Earth a Break

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia (5782) *

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

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

Since the Torah is a tree of life, its teaching and guidance apply to all aspects of the human condition, including the relationship between humans and the world they populate, but many believe that the values of Torah and the concern for ecology and the well-being of the planet are diametrically opposed. It is a view that took root inside us, in Orthodox Judaism, as well as outside, in the academic world where its major proponent was the famous historian Lynn White. White criticized Western civilization for drifting away from nature and blamed it on the Jewish heritage of the Christian world:

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

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

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

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

Today we have a consumer mentality of having anything, anywhere, anytime. One click, and it will be delivered to your doorstep, to your car, or even fridge. We now got used to next day, same day, and within the hour delivery, by drones, autonomous robots, and soon, teleportation. Gas-guzzlers roam the roads, and oil dependency forces political powers to redefine values and ideals, including democracy and human rights. In Las Vegas and Palm Springs neatly manicured lawns and lusciously green golf courses have been gulping for years monstrous amounts of water against environmentalists' protests, and now [ed: 2022] California is facing such a severe drought which might force it to slash its agrarian productivity by twenty five percent.

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

storms, as well as growing concerns of epidemics and food shortages brought about by our reckless behavior, does the public begin to grasp the enormity of the problem and the responsibility it places on humanity's shoulders.

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

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

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

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

Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi Haim Ovadia.

Devrei Torah from Rabbi Ovadia this year come from an unpublished draft of his forthcoming book on Tanach, which Rabbi Ovadia, who has generously shared with our readers. Rabbi Ovadia reserves all copyright rights to this material.

* Judaic faculty, Ramaz High School, New York; also Torah VeAhava. Until recently, Rabbi, Beth Sholom Sephardic Minyan (Potomac, MD). Faculty member, AJRCA non-denominational rabbinical school). **Many of Rabbi Ovadia's Devrei Torah are now available on Sefaria: <https://www.sefaria.org/profile/haim-ovadia?tab=sheets>** . The Sefaria articles include Hebrew text, which I must delete because of issues changing software formats. Rabbi Ovadia retains all rights (copyright) to this and all other Devrei Torah that he permits me to share.

A Bissel of Torah from a Tiny Jewish Community

By Rabbi Natanel Kaszovitz *

Auckland, New Zealand Hebrew Congregation **

This week I'm preparing for a new experience here in New Zealand. Tomorrow (Friday), I will be visiting a prison in Auckland. I've done similar visits before in East Africa, but I have a feeling the system here will be quite different. Last week, I met with a pastor who works within the correctional facilities, and he gave me an overview of how things operate.

In this week's Parashot, Behar–Bechukotai, we read about the Sabbatical year and the Jubilee year. The Torah teaches that during these times, those who had become servants would go free and return home. While we thankfully do not live in a society with slavery, we do have those who are incarcerated.

The Torah's model is striking. A person who became a servant often did so after stealing and being unable to repay what was owed. Their time was not meant simply as punishment, but as a process, one that allowed them to rebuild, learn from a stable environment, and ultimately return to society with dignity and the ability to contribute. This raises an important question for us today. Do our modern systems truly help rehabilitate individuals, or do they sometimes isolate people in ways that make reintegration even harder? Too often, people leave prison only to fall back into the same cycle, without the tools or support needed to build a different future.

As I go into this experience, I am hopeful. There are many dedicated people working within these systems who genuinely care about rehabilitation and human dignity. Perhaps the values we see in the Torah – accountability together with compassion, justice together with restoration, can continue to inspire better outcomes.

Wishing everyone a meaningful Shabbat,

B'ahavat Yisrael,

Rabbi Netanel

[Editor's note: If you became Rabbi of the only synagogue in a small, isolated Jewish community, at what level would you direct your Shabbat message for the congregation?]

* Rabbi Kaszovitz, an Israeli ordained at Ohr Torah Stone, previously served as Rabbi in Nairobi, Kenya. He became Rabbi of Auckland Hebrew Congregation in September 2025. Rabbi Moshe Rube, whose remarks I previously posted in this space, is in the process of starting a new Rabbinic position in Australia. Rabbi Rube is waiting for his visa to enter Australia, when he will be able to start his new position. I plan to use this space to include messages from Rabbi Kaszovitz and Rabbi Rube going forward.

** Rabbi Kaszovitz is now posting his Devrei Torah and classes on You Tube: <https://youtube.com/c/TheNairobisher> .

[Editor's note: If you became Rabbi of the only synagogue in a small, isolated Jewish community, at what level would you direct your Shabbat message for the congregation?]

Rav Kook Torah

Behar: Jubilee – National Reconciliation

In 1751, the Pennsylvania Assembly ordered a special bell be cast, commemorating the 50th anniversary of William Penn's "Charter of Privileges." The Speaker of the Assembly was entrusted with finding an appropriate inscription for what later became famous as the Liberty Bell. The best expression of freedom and equality that the speaker could find was the Biblical verse describing the Jubilee year:

You will blow the shofar on the tenth day of the seventh month; on Yom Kippur you will blow the shofar in all your land. You shall sanctify the fiftieth year, proclaiming freedom to all its inhabitants.
(Lev. 25:9–10)

The triumphant announcement of the Jubilee year, with blasts of the shofar, takes place on the tenth of Tishrei. This date is Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement.

Yet, this is a curious date to announce the new year. The Jubilee year, like any other year, begins on the first of Tishrei, on Rosh Hashanah. Why was the formal proclamation of the Jubilee year postponed until Yom Kippur, ten days later?

National Sabbath Rest

The Jubilee year is a super-Sabbatical year. Like the seventh year, agricultural labor is prohibited, and landowners forego all claims on produce grown during that year. The Jubilee also contains two additional aspects of social justice: the emancipation of slaves and the restoration of land to its original owner.

Just as the Sabbath day allows the individual to rest, so too the Sabbatical and Jubilee years provide rest for the nation. The entire nation is able to take a break from competition and economic struggle. The Sages noted that the phrase "*Sabbath to God*" appears both in the context of the weekly Sabbath and the Sabbatical year. Both are designed to direct us towards spiritual growth: the Sabbath on the individual level, and the Sabbatical year on the national level.

Healing Rifts in Society

The Talmud in Rosh Hashanah 8b relates that during the first ten days of the Jubilee year, the slaves were not sent home. Nor did they work. They would feast and drink, celebrating their freedom "*with crowns upon their heads.*" Only after the court blew the shofar on Yom Kippur would the newly freed slaves return home.

The freeing of slaves in the Jubilee year serves as an important safeguard for social order. Societies that rely on slave labor usually suffer from slave revolts and violent acts of vengeance by the underclass.[1]

Instead of attaining social justice through bloody revolt and violent upheaval, the Jubilee emancipation allows for peaceful and harmonious social change. The restoration of rights for the poor and disadvantaged becomes an inherent part of the societal and economic order.

Most significantly, during their final days of servitude, the freed slaves celebrate together with their former masters. The Torah also obligates the master to send off his servants with generous presents.[2] These conciliatory acts help heal the social and psychological wounds caused by socio-economic divisions and class estrangement. The national reconciliation reaches its peak on Yom Kippur, when the shofar exuberantly proclaimed freedom and equality.

Atonement for the Nation

Thus, the formal announcement of the Jubilee year is integrally connected to Yom Kippur. On that year, the Day of Atonement becomes a time of forgiveness and absolution, not only for the sins of the individual, but also for the sins of society.

(*Gold from the Land of Israel*, pp. 213-215. Adapted from the Forward to *Shabbat HaAretz*, p. 9.)

Endnotes:

1. Slave revolts were recurring feature of ancient Rome. In the United States, the abolition of slavery was only achieved after a horrific civil war.
2. When an indentured Jewish servant completes his term, the Torah requires that he be sent off with a parting gift (ha'anakah) in recognition of his service (Deut. 15:13–14). Interestingly, *Sefer HaChinuch* and Maharam of Rothenburg derived from this obligation a broader principle of providing severance gifts to workers. Israel's 1963 Severance Compensation Law explicitly invokes this mitzvah as an ethical foundation.

<https://ravkooktorah.org/behar58>

Behar Bechukotai: The Power of a Curse (5780)

By Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l, Former UK Chief Rabbi *

The book of Vayikra draws to a close by outlining the blessings that will follow if the people are faithful to their covenant with God. Then it describes the curses that will befall them if they are not. The general principle is clear. In biblical times, the fate of the nation mirrored the conduct of the nation. If people behaved well, the nation would prosper. If they behaved badly, eventually bad things would happen. That is what the Prophets knew. As Martin Luther King paraphrased it, "*The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice.*" [1] Not always immediately but ultimately, good is rewarded with good, bad with bad.

Our parsha starkly sets out the terms of that equation: if you obey God, there will be rain in its season, the ground will yield its crops and the trees their fruit; there will be peace. The curses, though, are almost three times as long and much more dramatic in the language they use:

"But if you will not listen to Me and carry out all these commands ... then I will do this to you: I will bring on you sudden terror, wasting diseases and fever that will destroy your sight and sap your strength...

I will break your stubborn pride and make the sky above you like iron and the ground beneath you like bronze... I will send wild animals against you, and they will rob you of your children, destroy your cattle and make you so few in number that your roads will be deserted... 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." Lev. 26: 14-37

There is a savage eloquence here. The images are vivid. There is a pulsing rhythm to the verses, as if the harsh fate that would overtake the nation is inexorable, cumulative and accelerating. The effect is intensified by the repeated hammer

blows: “If after all this ... if you remain hostile ... if in spite of these things ... if in spite of this.” The word *keri*, key to the whole passage, is repeated seven times. It appears nowhere else in the whole of Tanach. Its meaning is uncertain. It may mean rebelliousness, obstinacy, indifference, hard-heartedness, reluctance or being-left-to-chance. But the basic principle is clear. If you act toward Me with *keri*, says God, I will turn that same attribute against you, and you will be devastated.

It has long been a custom to read the *tochachah*, the curses, both here and in the parallel passage in Devarim 28, in a low voice in the synagogue, which has the effect of robbing them of their terrifying power if said out loud. But they are fearful enough however they are read. And both here and in Devarim, the section on curses is longer and far more graphic than the section on blessings.

This seems to contradict a basic principle of Judaism, that God’s generosity to those who are faithful to Him vastly exceeds His punishment of those who are not. “*The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands ... He punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation*” (Ex. 34:6-7). Rashi does the arithmetic: “*It follows, therefore, that the measure of reward is greater than the measure of punishment by five hundred to one, for in respect of the measure of good it says: “maintaining love to thousands”* (meaning at least two thousand generations), while punishment lasts for at most four generations.

The whole idea contained in the 13 Attributes of Compassion is that God’s love and forgiveness are stronger than His justice and punishment. Why, therefore, are the curses in this week’s parsha so much longer and stronger than the blessings?

The answer is that **God loves and forgives, but with the proviso that, when we do wrong, we acknowledge the fact, express remorse, make restitution to those we have harmed, and repent. In the middle of the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy is the statement, “Yet He does not leave the guilty unpunished” (Ex. 34:7). God does not forgive the unrepentant sinner, because were He to do so, it would make the world a worse place, not a better one. More people would sin if there were no downside to doing so.** [emphasis added]

The reason the curses are so dramatic is not because God seeks to punish, but the precise opposite. The Talmud tells us that God weeps when He allows disaster to strike His people: “*Woe to Me, that due to their sins I destroyed My house, burned My Temple and exiled them [My children] among the nations of the world.*”[2] The curses were meant as a warning. They were intended to deter, scare, discourage. They are like a parent warning a young child not to play with electricity. The parent may deliberately intend to scare the child, but he or she does so out of love, not severity.

The classic instance is the book of Jonah. God tells Jonah the Prophet to go to Nineveh and warn the people, “*In forty days Nineveh will be destroyed.*” He does so. The people take him seriously. They repent. God then relents from His threat to destroy the city. Jonah complains to God that He has made him look ridiculous. His prophecy has not come true. **Jonah has failed to understand the difference between a prophecy and a prediction. If a prediction comes true, it has succeeded. If a prophecy comes true, it has failed. The Prophet tells the people what will happen if they fail to change. A prophecy is not a prediction but a warning. It describes a fearful future in order to persuade the people to avert it. That is what the *tochachah* is.** [emphasis added]

In their new book, *The Power of Bad*,[3] John Tierney and Roy Baumeister argue on the basis of substantial scientific evidence, that bad has far more impact on us than good. We pay more attention to bad news than good news. Bad health makes more difference to us than good health. Criticism affects us more than praise. A bad reputation is easier to acquire and harder to lose than a good one.

Humans are designed – “*hardwired*” – to take notice of and rapidly react to threat. Failing to notice a lion is more dangerous than failing to notice a ripened fruit on a tree. Recognising the kindness of a friend is good and virtuous, but not as significant as ignoring the animosity of an enemy. One traitor can betray an entire nation.

It follows that the stick is a more powerful motivator than the carrot. Fear of the curse is more likely to affect behaviour than desire for the blessing. Threat of punishment is more effective than promise of reward. Tierney and Baumeister document this over a wide range of cases from education to crime rates. Where there is a clear threat of punishment for bad behaviour, people behave better.

Judaism is a religion of love and forgiveness. But it is also a religion of justice. The punishments in the Torah are there not because God loves to punish, but because He wants us to act well. Imagine a country that had laws but no punishments. Would people keep the law? No. Everyone would choose to be a free-rider, taking advantage of the efforts of others without contributing oneself. **Without punishment, there is no effective law, and without law there is no society. The more powerfully one can present the bad, the more likely people are to choose the good. That is why the tochachah is so powerful, dramatic and fear-inducing. The fear of bad is the most powerful motivator of good.** [emphasis added]

I believe that being warned of the bad helps us to choose the good. Too often we make the wrong choices because we don't think of the consequences. That's how global warming happened. That's how financial crashes happen. That's how societies lose their solidarity. Too often, people think of today, not the day after tomorrow. The Torah, painting in the most graphic detail what can happen to a nation when it loses its moral and spiritual bearings, is speaking to us in every generation, saying: Beware. Take note. Don't function on autopilot. Once a society begins to fall apart, it is already too late. Avoid the bad. Choose the good. Think long and choose the road that leads to blessings.

FOOTNOTES:

[1] This is a quote that Dr. King used many times, including during the march from Selma in 1965 when answering the question: How long will it take to see social justice? This is now widely hailed as one of his most famous quotes, although King was himself quoting 19th-century Unitarian minister and abolitionist Theodore Parker of Massachusetts.

[2] Brachot 3a.

[3] John Tierney and Roy Baumeister, *The Power of Bad*, Allen Lane, 2019.

Around the Shabbat Table:

[1] Do you think that in the larger picture, over time, there is justice in the world (as the quote from Martin Luther King suggests)?

[2] Why is the list of curses so much longer than the list of blessings, when God is slow to anger and full of compassion?

[3] Why isn't love of God enough of an incentive to keep the covenant?

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 normally select an earlier Devar.

<https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/behav/the-power-of-a-curse/>

Alone in the World: 43 Years Since Entebbe

By Lazer Gurkow * © Chabad 2022

Entebbe

Next month will mark the 43rd [ed.: now 47th] anniversary of Israel's finest hour: the hostage rescue at Entebbe. When the crisis began in June of 1976, Israel firmly believed that the fate of the Jewish hostages was the legal responsibility of France, under whose flag the airplane had flown when it was hijacked. But, on the fifth day of the crisis, when all but the Jewish hostages were released, the Israeli government realized that Jews were once again alone in the world.

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

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

Alone in The World

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

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

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

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

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

Begin's Bible Group

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Finding Respect

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

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

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

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

FOOTNOTES:

1. Leviticus 25:26; Rashi, *ibid.*; Babylonian Talmud, Kiddushin 21a.
2. Numbers 23:9.
3. Yehudah Avner, *The Prime Ministers*, The Toby Press, 2010, pp. 395-399. In 1972, Yitzchak Rabin had a similar discussion on this very verse with the Lubavitcher Rebbe.

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

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

Behar Bechukotai: The Blessings of Peace

By Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky *

I will grant peace in the land. You will lie down with no cause for fear. I will remove wild beasts from the land, and no army will pass through your land. (Lev. 26:6)

Rashi states that all the blessings of prosperity mentioned in the previous verses are worthless unless we are blessed with peace. This is true in our personal lives as well. We cannot begin to make use of the gifts of wealth, family, health, and talents with which G-d has blessed us unless we are first at peace with ourselves and those around us. Our minds and hearts are battlefields of conflicting ideas and emotions, the people closest to us all have divergent needs and agendas, and the world at large is a cacophony of voices pulling everyone in different directions. We will therefore be too confused and distracted to accomplish anything unless we possess a strategy for reconciling all these competing forces.

That strategy is the Torah, whose “*ways are ways of pleasantness and all its paths are peace.*” The Torah teaches us how to subdue our material drives to our spiritual drives, giving our lives clarity and unity of purpose. When our family lives are guided by the Torah’s values, there is domestic harmony. Strong foundations of personal and family peace enable us to then promote peace in society both by means of our personal, inspiring example and by disseminating Divine consciousness.

--From Kehot's *Daily Wisdom* Vol. 3

* Insights by **the Lubavitcher Rebbe** on the weekly parashat from Chabad's *Daily Wisdom* 3 by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky.

Gut Shabbos,

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via the Internet

Shabbat Shalom

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Shabbat Parashat Behar-Bechukotai

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The Person in the Parsha

Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

All Roads Lead to the Beit Midrash

This week, we read one of a series of double parshiyot, Behar and Bechukotai. Both parshiyot are rich in verses which lend themselves to diverse explanations and elaborations, many of which are to be found in the vast Midrashic literature with which we are blessed.

I've chosen to focus on the opening phrase from the second of our two parshiyot, Bechukosai. It reads, "Im bechukosai telachu," which is generally translated as "If you follow My statutes...". However, the literal translation, and exact meaning, of the verse is "If you walk in My statutes." The verb "walk" in this context is a bit puzzling, even provocative. What might it mean to "walk" in statutes, to walk in the laws of Torah?

To address this dilemma, many commentaries quote the following passage in the Midrash Rabba on this verse:

"If you walk in My statutes". This is expressed in the verse (Psalms 119:59), "I have planned my paths and have redirected my feet toward Your teachings." Thus, King David said to the Master of the Universe: "Each and every day I plan my destination toward a particular place, toward a specific residence. Instead, my feet guide me to Your synagogues and study halls, l'batei knessiot u'l'batei midrashot".

The eighteenth-century commentator, Rabbi Chaim ben Atar, author of Ohr HaChaim, offers no less than 42 explanations for this unusual phrase and this startling Midrash. In the sixteenth of these many interpretations, he suggests that "walk" might mean "travel." Thus, the meaning would be that if you are about to travel on a journey, you are advised to study a bit of Torah beforehand so that you "walk/travel" in the company of the Torah you have studied. The Torah thus accompanies the traveler on his journey, sheltering him from the dangers of the road. This approach echoes the teaching of our Sages in Talmud Bavli Berakhot 14a to the effect that it is prohibited to depart upon a journey before one has engaged in Torah study, as is written (Psalms 85:14), "Justice goes before him as he sets out on his way".

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The twentieth-century major halachic authority and tragic victim of the Holocaust, Rabbi Yissachar Shlomo Teichtal, favors this interpretation of the Ohr HaChaim, over the other forty-one. He writes:

This Midrash tells the story of King David who would not embark upon any journey, whether a short foray or a lengthy expedition, without first studying some Torah. Of course, King David had access to many study halls, but we can nevertheless emulate his practice even if study halls are not available to us. Torah study in the privacy of one's home is acceptable, and even a brief verse or two of Torah will suffice if that is all that time allows.

There is another way of understanding King David's statement as narrated in the Midrash. King David is, in a sense, reporting upon his own experience. After all, he is a king, and a very busy one at that. He starts off his day with all sorts of plans, appointments, meetings, and destinations. He has worldly responsibilities of all sorts. His intentions correspond to his royal role.

Yet somehow, at the end of the day, and often long before that, he finds himself in the beit midrash studying the Almighty's Torah. Has he deliberately and consciously abandoned his plans and mundane tasks? No!!

Somehow his "feet" have misled him. His inner self has propelled him to take a detour and follow the path to the study hall rather than the path to lesser destinations.

I have found this "take" on King David's experience an apt metaphor for so much of the human experience. Do not most of us chart our futures guided by all sorts of plans regarding our education, our lifestyle, our careers, our relationships? At times, those plans are realized, although seldom exactly as we thought they would turn out. Often, however, fate intervenes in unpredictable and unpredictable ways, and we find ourselves in situations far removed from what we had anticipated. In moments of religious contemplation, we may even come to realize that it was not fate that intervened, but a Divine source, a surprisingly new spiritual script written and guided by the One Above.

Frankly, I have felt this "Davidic" experience more than once in my own career. I began as a

teacher of Torah to high school boys. I was tempted to pursue higher secular education and pursued and obtained advanced degrees and professional training in the field of psychotherapy. I found employment in school systems, clinics, colleges, private practice, and even Jewish community work. I enjoyed those experiences and found them meaningful and spiritually rewarding. I knew where I was going—or so I thought.

My "feet" kept taking me back to synagogue and study hall. Opportunities arose, environments changed, the times beckoned, and I found myself teaching Talmud, delivering Torah lectures to a wide array of audiences, and leading prayer services. I went through a series of career changes, some moderate, and some totally life changing. My children, now grandparents themselves, would often tease me tauntingly, saying "Daddy, what do you want to be when you grow up?"

I'm not sufficiently presumptuous to compare myself to King David, but I've concluded long ago that he was not speaking only for himself in that beautiful Midrashic passage. He was talking about a very widespread basic human experience.

I especially have come to see this human experience play out in a wide range of social contexts.

One dramatic instance of this phenomenon can be discerned in the so-called Baal Teshuvah movement. We have been witnessing this development for some sixty years now. Men and women, some quite young, some middle aged, some quite old, who were ignorant of Jewish observance and who were planning totally secular, nay gentile-like, lives, who were already living lives totally ignorant or deeply alienated from things Jewish. At some point, after some chance encounter with a rabbi or teacher, after spending a Shabbat in an observant home, after meeting a man or

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woman with whom they fell in love and who introduced them to an observant life-style, or any one of a multitude of other scenarios, their “feet” led them not just to synagogues and study halls but to a redefinition of their entire lifestyle.

There are other instances of this phenomenon, but let us conclude with one dramatic one. I refer to the young men and women with lifelong exposure to traditional Jewish observance. We refer to them in a language similar to the verses I’ve been referencing in this essay. We call them “off the derech,” off the path. They very much resemble, of all people, King David. They too have started their “day” planning to wander in so many directions, all “off the path.”

But at some point, for a nearly infinite number of reasons, their “feet” have redirected them. Sometimes it is an inexplicably retrieved “leap of faith.” In other circumstances, it is a long, arduous, and back-and-forth process. But it is often, increasingly often, that their paths twist and turn back to “the path,” the derech. Typically, it is not precisely the derech they once abandoned.

It is a derech that fits them as individuals and that allows them to return to an authentic and personally satisfying Jewish life, a return to the batei knessiot u'batei midrashot that speak to them and meet their legitimate and sincerely desired spiritual goals.

Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Two Explanations of the "Giborei Koach" Title Given to Shmita Observers

In Parshas Behar, the Torah says, regarding the Shmita year: “The land will give its fruit and you will eat to satisfaction; and you will dwell securely upon it. If you will say: What will we eat in the seventh year? — behold! We will not sow and we will not gather our crop! I will ordain My blessing for you in the sixth year and it will yield a crop sufficient for the three years. You will sow in the eighth year, but you will eat from the old crop; until the ninth year, until the arrival of its crop, you will eat the old.” (Vayikra 25:19-22).

There is a famous Medrash that we have spoken about numerous times over the years. The Medrash in Vayikra Rabba quotes the pasuk in Tehillim: “Giborei koach oseh devoro” (Tehillim 103:20) referring to people of mighty strength, people of character. Who are the people this pasuk is mentioning? The Medrash says that normally a mitzvah takes a single day or a single week or a single month to accomplish. However, people sitting and watching their fields lying fallow while still paying taxes, etc. is extraordinary because it continues for an entire year. The Medrash says

there are no greater “giborei koach” than these people.

Yom Kippur is hard because we cannot eat for 25 hours. But it is just one day. Pesach is hard. We can’t have pizza for an entire week! But people facing great financial uncertainty for an entire year – those people are true “giborei koach!”

There is a famous question that many people ask on this Medrash: What is the big deal about this special attribute of “giborei koach” associated with Shmita observance? After all, the Torah assures us that in the year prior to Shmita (the sixth year of the seven-year Sabbatical cycle), the crop will produce triple what it produces in a normal year (years one through five of the Sabbatical cycle).

If a person earns \$100,000 a year, and then one year, he earns \$300,000, he can go back to Kollel for two years! He has the cash-flow to cover it. He sees the money in the bank. So, if the pasuk promises a bounty crop – a bonanza of three years-worth of produce – what is the special attribute of “giborei koach,” with which the pasuk praises Shmita observers?

There are many answers given to this question. I saw two answers that relate to human nature:

Yes, I received a bounty crop in the sixth year and I know that I am not going to starve. But in the meantime, as I watch my field, I see that (even though I did not plant during Shmita) things grow on their own. What happens to the produce that grows on its own? The poor are permitted to come in and take it. The owner sits back and watches his field, into which he has invested his blood, sweat, and tears all these years, sitting hefker (halachically ownerless), with strangers coming and taking all its produce! And guess what? They are not even saying “Thank you” because they don’t need to say “Thank you” because it’s hefker.

I may be a generous fellow and may even be a big ba’al tzedakah. I write out checks for charity and have the satisfaction of knowing that I am giving to worthy causes. I have that positive psychological feeling of knowing that I am doing the mitzvah of tzedakah and I receive the “thank you.” People realize that I am giving them money. But it is another thing entirely to sit back and watch my produce treated as a “hefker-velt,” with all kinds of people just trampling over my field taking whatever they want without even acknowledging me.

Even though one may have the \$300,000 in the bank, it is very difficult for him to sit back and let all this happen. This is the attribute of giborei koach.

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The other answer to this question is another great principle of human nature: how easily we forget. True, in the sixth year I earned triple what I earn in a normal year, but that was in the past. In the seventh year, I did not earn anything. People don’t remember that last year they took in triple their normal income. It is the old principle of “What have you done for me lately?” We forget the good.

There is an oft-quoted parable of the dentist and the root canal. Over Shabbos, a person has a horrible tooth ache. He is in excruciating pain. He literally cannot find a place to sit in peace. On Motzai Shabbos, he calls up his dentist and tells him that he is in terrible pain. The dentist says “Come right in.” “Now?” “Yes. Come in right now.”

The fellow goes into the dentist’s office on Motzai Shabbos. The dentist treats him and relieves the pain. The patient says to the dentist “How much do I owe you?” The dentist answers “You owe me half of what you wanted to give me before I fixed your tooth.” This means that when the patient was in pain, he was willing to give the dentist an arm and a leg. “Whatever it is, I can’t live like this.” But after the fact, we forget that. That’s the way we are.

So yes, I earned the money the previous year, but that was yesterday. That was last year. Therefore, it is still very difficult for me to sit back and take with equanimity the fact that my land is now hefker.

The Juxtaposition of Shmita With “And When Your Brother Becomes Poor”

Immediately following the parsha of Shmita, the Torah goes into a whole downward spiral of “When your brother becomes poor and needs to sell his inheritance...” (Vayikra 25:25-28). The Torah talks about a poor person who falls on hard times. The Gemara (Eruchin 30) comments on the juxtaposition of the mitzvah of Shmitah and this downward spiral of the poor person:

Come and see the severity of the prohibition of doing business with seventh-year produce: A person does business with fruits of the Shmita year and what happens to him? He falls on hard times. He needs to sell his movable objects (furniture, car, etc.) because he does not have enough money. This means that the Ribono shel Olam is sending him a message: You tried to make money by illegally selling Shmita fruit. Now look what’s happening to you. If he doesn’t get the message, he will not only need to sell his moveable objects, he will even need to sell his real estate. Ultimately, he will be so poor that he will even need to sell his daughter into slavery. If he still doesn’t “get it,” eventually he will even need to sell himself as a slave.

This, the Gemara explains, is the juxtaposition of the parsha of Shmita and the person who falls on hard times. Rabbeinu Yakov Yosef, the one and only “Chief Rabbi of New York City” (brought over from Vilna at the end of the 1800s to serve in that position) offered another insight into this juxtaposition:

If a poor person comes to you and says “Listen, I am poor. I can’t make my mortgage payment. You need to help me out.” Our reaction might be “Don’t worry. Have bitachon (trust in G-d). The Ribono shel Olam will take care of you.” However, that is not a proper reaction.

Rav Yisrael Salanter once formulated a very crucial ethical rule: Regarding another person’s needs, we all need to be atheists. When someone needs help, we should not assume “the Ribono shel Olam will help.” No. You need to be the one who helps. Regarding your friend’s gashmiyus (material needs), the attitude must be “Maybe the Ribono shel Olam is not going to help. I need to help.”

Rav Yisrael used to say that people make a mistake. Everyone worries about his own gashmiyus, but has bitachon about his own ruchniyus (confidence that everything will be okay with his spirituality). It should be the other way around. When it comes to your ruchniyus, you need to worry, and let Hakadosh Baruch Hu take care of your gashmiyus. However, regarding someone else’s gashmiyus, you need to be a kofer (denier), or at least an agnostic and say “No. I need to take care of this fellow.”

The Ribono shel Olam placed this needy person in your lap. Don’t tell him to have faith in the Ribono shel Olam and that everything will be alright. Bitachon is for you. For the other person’s problems, you need to take out your checkbook and be practical.

Maybe, says Rav Yakov Yosef, that explains the juxtaposition at the beginning of Parshas Behar. A person finished the year of Shmitah. “I didn’t work a drop. I had bitachon and I made it through the year. I know what it means to live a life of bitachon. I put my money where my mouth is.” Then a poor person comes to me and complains about his financial needs. I should not lecture him about my bitachon and how I spent an entire year not earning a dime. A person has a tendency, after he has gone through a nisayon and passed the test, to go to the next person and say “You must have bitachon as well.”

No. That is all well and good for yourself. But when someone is in need, don’t be frum on his cheshbon! Don’t play the “bitachon card” on him. For him, you need to take out your checkbook.

Dvar Torah: Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

Make those moments last

If we experience an uplifting, inspirational moment, we should take that experience with us through to the rest of our lives.

We learn this important lesson from the portion of Behar. Within this portion, the Torah introduces us to the concept of Yovel, the Jubilee celebrated once every fifty years. But what is the derivation of the term Yovel?

Rashi explains that it means the sounding of the shofar. There was a very special ceremony at the conclusion of the year when the shofar was blown and heard in an extraordinary manner by the people there.

The Ramban disagrees. He says that if Yovel means the sounding of shofar, you’re not going to name the entire year preceding it after one brief moment.

Rather, says the Ramban, Yovel means taking something forward. And he learns it from the book of Yeshayahu, chapter 23, where the prophet says, “yovilua deracheha,” enable your steps to take you forward. And we know that in modern Hebrew lehovil means to schlep, to take something with you. And if you’re in Israel, and you see a van with the word *hovala* written on it, that means it’s a removals van, where you’re taking items from one place to their next destination.

So, the Ramban says that the message of Yovel, therefore, is that when you experience that extraordinary moment of the sounding of the shofar, which takes place only once every fifty years, don’t cast it into your past, but take it with you through to your future, so that it will continue to guide and inspire you always.

This is the context within which, in the *havdalah* ceremony at the end of every Shabbat, we smell the spices, the *besamim*, to enable the spirituality of Shabbat to permeate through to the week that follows. It’s also for this reason that we have the concept of *Isru Chag*, the day after a festival, to guarantee that the special flavour of the Yom Tov will continue thereafter.

So therefore, from the concept of Yovel, let us always remember that if we are blessed to have a highly inspirational, and wonderful, memorable moment in our lives, let’s not just leave it in our past.

Let’s guarantee that the Yovel moment will accompany us through to the rest of our lives.

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

Rabbi Michael Rosensweig

Yovel and Yom Kippur: Manifesting A

Likutei Divrei Torah

Pervasive Commitment to the Principle of Kulo la-Hashem

“Vehavarta shofar teruah bachodesh hashevii beasor lachodesh, beYom haKippurim taaviru shofar bekol artzechem” (Vayikra 25:9). Parshat Behar establishes that the Yovel year, promoting liberty (25:10 - “ukeratem deror baaretz lekol yoshvehah”) with its attendant mitzvot - the release of all slaves, the return of ancestral lands (“ve-shavtem ish el achuzato ve-ish el mishpachto tashuvu”), and the abstention from primary agricultural activity (25:11) - is specifically ushered in by the shofar on the most holy of days, Yom Kippur, the apex of intense repentance and supreme atonement, in which the *kohen gadol* penetrates the inner sanctum (*kodesh ha-kodoshim*) of the Beit ha-Mikdash. This confluence is certainly intriguing and also somewhat puzzling.

There is evidence that Yovel already begins at the beginning of calendar year fifty, as do the partially parallel laws of *shemittah*. The *Mishneh* (Rosh Hashanah 2a) asserts that the “*rosh hashanah*” for Yovel commences on the first day of Tishrei. Indeed, the Talmud (Rosh Hashanah 8b) is troubled by the apparent contradiction, and conclude somewhat ambiguously and complexly that, “*melamed shemitkadeshet veholechet mitchilatatah...mei-Rosh Hashanah ad Yom haKippurim lo hayu avadim niftarim lebateihen velo mishtabdin leadonehem...kivan shehigia Yom haKippurim taku bet din bashofar nifteru avadim lebateihen vesadot chozrot lebaleihem*”! Rashi (25:10, and Rosh Hashanah 8b) emphasizes the immediate initiation of Yovel’s sanctity on Rosh Hashanah and underscores *bet din*’s formal pronouncement at that time. And yet, the shofar sounding is evidently intentionally delayed underscoring the link with Yom Kippur. [While Ibn Ezra appears to be comfortable with Yom Kippur simply representing the beginning of the year, this position seems problematic, especially given the double formulation, noted by the Sifrei - “*ba’asor lachodesh beYom halippurim*”.] Moreover, others posit that the primary initiation of Yovel requires the shofar blast on Yom Kippur, furthering this enigmatic connection. *Minchat Chinuch* (mitzvah 332) and others (see *Ohr Sameach* and *Chidushei Rav Hayim ha-Levi*, *Hilchot Kiddush haChodesh*, ch. 2) note that the mitzvah of *bet din*’s sanctifying proclamation, unlike the shofar blast on Yom Kippur, may not be an indispensable prerequisite to the onset of *kedushat Yovel*. [see also *Rabbeinu Chananel*, Rosh Hashanah 9b and the formulation of the *Sefer ha-Chinuch*, each of which attests to the central role of the shofar on Yom Kippur.]

There is a striking passage in the Sifra (cited by Rashi 25:9, see also Ramban’s critique and

his conclusion that each individual is obligated to produce a teruah, and see Meshech Chochmah ad loc) that conveys that while sounding the shofar on the shabbat of Rosh Hashanah is prohibited, its role on Yom Kippur and even on Shabbat Yom Kippur announcing or even triggering Yovel is totally sanctioned. Remarkably, Meshech Chochmah perceives this convergence as fundamentally integrating the teruah of Yovel into the core kedushat ha-yom of Yom Kippur. On this basis, he posits that Rebbe's principle (Shavuot 13a) that the atonement capacity of Yom Kippur in the absence of repentance does not extend to core Yom Kippur violations- such as violating the fast or prohibition against work on that day- would apply also to abstaining from the Yovel teruah and, under some conditions, possibly other Yovel violations, as well!

Indeed, Ralbag, Abarbanel (and by extension Kli Yakar), and others particularly emphasize the intentionality of this intriguing timing, reinforced by the Torah's double emphasis of the calendar day that is Yom Kippur. What is it about Yovel in particular, even in contrast to shemittah with which it considerably overlaps, that accounts for this Yom Kippur convergence?

Abarbanel already notes the Torah's singular presentation and description of Yovel, even vis a vis shemittah. While shemittah is ubiquitously depicted as a "shabbat" (25:2,4,5,6), Yovel is never described in this way. More significantly, the term "kedushah" is used repeatedly (25:10,12) in connection with Yovel to the exclusion of shemittah! The use of the shofar and the "deror" proclamation apply only to Yovel. Moreover, while there is a broader economic dimension to shemittah, shemittat kesafim (debt cancellation), this facet is not integrated into the Torah's presentation in Parshat Behar, applies outside of Eretz Yisrael, and fundamentally constitutes an extraordinary act of charity (hence, its location in Parshat Reeh). In contrast the liberation of slaves and the reset on legacy ownership in Yovel is fundamentally an assertion of exclusive Divine sovereignty extending well beyond the confines of Eretz Yisrael - "ki Li haaretz", a testament to the broader "kulo la-Hashem" principle that overlaps the core theme of Yom Kippur. Human transactions, particularly related to apparent material ownership and control, are completely neutralized by Divine fiat. [While there is greater affinity between shemittah and Yovel with respect to the agricultural limitations, it is conceivable that subtle differences pertaining even to this realm, especially in light of some of the other discrepancies we have highlighted, may reflect conceptually diverse motifs. I hope to address this elsewhere.]

In this respect, it is noteworthy that both Ralbag (albeit in a more theological fashion - see Vayikra 25:9, and his comments at the end of Emor - toaliyot s.v. ve-hineh Rosh Chodesh tishrei) and Abarbanel explicate that Yovel alludes to Hashem's comprehensive and exclusive sovereignty, and especially the primacy of pure spirituality, as do the principles of "veinitem" and atonement on Yom Kippur. In one formulation, Abarbanel ("derech ha-echad") posits that while shemittah, a Shabbat, corresponds to the Divine gift of creation and the challenge of sanctifying a physical world and life, Yovel targets the even greater spiritual purpose and goal of creation, the effective realization of mattan Torah and halachic life! Kli Yakar, building on this theme, accentuates that Yovel corresponds to mattan Torah, that the cry of the shofar and the aspiration for authentic "deror" that neutralizes man's inclination for excessive material accumulation as well as other distractions associated with his physicality, reinforce this motif. Yovel - mattan Torah and Yom Kippur inspire man to embrace his spiritual potential, grounding him in a more sanctified foundation, that is authentically liberating. Elsewhere (haderech ha-sheni), Abarbanel suggests that the Yovel year alludes to the need for an exclusive spiritual focus particularly as one progresses through life and approaches his ultimate destiny, parallel to the inui afflictions of Yom Kippur, as one annually contemplates ultimate purpose and fate at a critical life juncture! Perhaps the shofar blast, a fundamentally ineffable mode of communication that bypasses concrete articulation and a more finite message, is a particularly appropriate vehicle to convey this facet of "kulo la-Hashem". Ralbag refers also to Rambam's celebrated formulation (Hilchos Teshuvah) of the shofar blast as a means of stirring one from spiritual lethargy and complacency, in the Yovel framework. The prominence of "kedushah" in this context that demands a comprehensive commitment to a Divine-spiritual orientation is evident. The focus on "deror", an aspirational liberation, is equally compelling. Chazal frequently emphasize that true liberation entails discipline, and a purposeful commitment - "ein ben chorin ela mi sheosek be-Torah umitzvot". Thus, the disappointment with eved nirtzah who, until Yovel, opts to be an eved le-avadim, rather than to strive for true liberation as an eved Hashem. The symbolic significance of the legal termination of any competing human subservience explains the sweeping formulation - "ukeratem deror baaretz lekol yoshveha"- notwithstanding the actual likely low number of avadim that were concretely owned and freed.

Finally, we note that Yom Kippur's singular status, reflected in all of its halachic manifestations, is inextricably linked with the

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theme of "kulo la-Hashem", the idea that a life of balance that revolves around the challenging aspiration of sanctifying the physical and material dimensions of life recurrently requires a pause that exclusively accentuates the comprehensive commitment to pure spirituality. We abstain from physical pleasures and constructive toil on Yom Kippur to reassert our core credentials as ovdei Hashem. This annual experience establishes that these same activities are not only begrudgingly permissible, but even idealistic - sanctified expressions of avodat Hashem when undertaken in an aspirational halachic framework and with the goal of furthering the mission of "mamlechet kohanim vegoy kadosh". The Yovel assertion of "kedushah" and authentic "deror" formulated by the shofar blast specifically on Yom Kippur, the quintessential day of "kulo la-Hashem" immeasurably facilitates the realization of this broad national aspiration.

Mizrachi Dvar Torah

"Fields Will Yet Be Bought in This Land" A Prophecy of Purchase and Promise, Redemption and Resolve By Rabbanit Shani Taragin

Although this week we read the haftarah of Bechukotai, drawn from Yirmiyahu chapter 16, I could not let the haftarah of Parshat Behar – one of the most poignant and hopeful prophecies in Sefer Yirmiyahu – pass by unnoticed. Nestled within the shadows of national calamity, the haftarah of Behar (Yirmiyahu 32:6–27) offers a powerful vision of redemption, rooted in faith and bound to the eternal bond between Am Yisrael and Eretz Yisrael.

Set during the final, devastating days of the First Temple period, this prophecy unfolds while Jerusalem is under siege by the Babylonians. Yirmiyahu himself is imprisoned by King Tzidkiyahu for foretelling the city's fall and the exile to come. It is in this bleak setting that Hashem instructs the prophet to perform a striking act of hope: to purchase a field in his hometown of Anatot from his cousin Chanamel, and to preserve the deed as a legal and lasting record.

This act appears startling. Why invest in land that is about to be overrun by enemy forces? Why purchase property that may soon be rendered worthless?

The answer lies in the deep symbolism of the moment – and its connection to Parshat Behar. The parasha includes the mitzvah of redeeming the land of a kinsman who was forced to sell due to poverty: "If your brother becomes impoverished and sells some of his property, his closest relative shall come and redeem what his brother sold" (Vayikra 25:25). Though it occupies only a single verse

in the parasha, this mitzvah encapsulates a profound message about familial responsibility, national continuity, and unwavering trust in the future.

Why did Chazal choose to spotlight this brief verse through such a rich and dramatic haftarah? Because Yirmiyahu's purchase is not merely a financial transaction – it is a public act of faith. Even as the city burns and exile nears, the prophet affirms that the bond between Am Yisrael and its land is not severed. The land may be desolate, but the covenant lives on.

Yirmiyahu faithfully records the details of the sale in both an "open" and a "sealed" scroll, storing them in an earthenware jar to endure through generations. When he questions Hashem about the purpose of this act – given the imminent destruction – Hashem responds with gentle strength: "I am Hashem... Is anything too wondrous for Me?" (Yirmiyahu 32:27). Just as Hashem once assured Sarah Imeinu that life could blossom from her barren womb, so too does He promise Yirmiyahu that this devastated land will yet see rebirth.

The message is timeless. Parashat Behar teaches that the Land of Israel belongs ultimately to Hashem. Our claim to it is sacred, not secular. The yovel laws restore ancestral lands, affirming the eternal connection between each family and their inheritance, and between the nation and its G-d-given home.

In our own time, this prophecy breathes with renewed vitality. We live in an era of miracles: barren hills transformed into thriving cities, ancient vineyards replanted, and a people long exiled returned to their soil. Even amid ongoing threats and painful losses, we dare to hope, to build, to buy, and to believe—because we know the promise is real.

"Fields and vineyards will yet be bought in this land." Not only as a prophecy of the past, but as the unfolding reality of today. May we continue to witness the miraculous rebirth of our nation, and may the land and its people flourish in faith, peace, and redemption.

**Torah.Org Dvar Torah
by Rabbi Label Lam**

It's Always Worth It

If you will go in My decrees and guard My Mitzvos and do them... (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)

From this simple conditional "if- then" statement flows a world of blessing that matches our best hopes. The "Torahs

Cohanim" adds a spice to the mix that gives a new flavor and meaning to the verse. "The sages taught that the word "if"- "IM" is an expression of request. And similarly, you find, "If only My people would listen to Me, and Israel would walk in My ways, I would immediately subdue their enemies and turn My hand against their tormentors. (Tehillim 81:14-15). Therefore, it is written, "If you will go in My statutes" meaning to say, "If only"- you would strive in Torah!"

Why do we need to be pleaded with to learn Torah? Anyone who has experienced the joy of learning Torah is immediately convinced by the experience that this is a delicious activity. I don't have to stand over a child in the pizza shop and promise him that if he will eat his pizza and spicy fries, I will get him an ice cream too. It's already flavorful and meaningful on so many levels. "Taste and see that HASHEM is good!" King David tells us.

On the original march to Mount Sinai HASHEM expresses to the Nation of Israel, "And now, if you obey Me and keep My covenant, you shall be to Me a treasure out of all peoples, for Mine is the entire earth..." Rashi explains why this incredible promise is being held out in advance as an inducement. He says, "And now. If now you accept upon yourselves, it will be pleasant for you in the future, since all beginnings are difficult." That's the catch phrase! "All beginnings are difficult."

We say every day a statement from Mishne Peah, "Talmud Torah Knegeg Kulam"- The learning of Torah is equal to all Mitzvos!" This is true about every word of Torah. That is wildly awesome!

We have another important Talmudic principle from Tractate Sukkah, that "the greater someone is, the greater is his negative inclination". People who have achieved greatness in Torah have certainly had to overcome strong obstacles and the Yetzer Hora is working overtime to topple them in subtle ways.

This applies to all matters of holiness. The greater a matter is, the greater is its opposition. I heard from Rabbi Avigdor Miller ztl. that "just as Talmud Torah knegeg kulam, kulam Knegeg Talmud Torah. – Just as Talmud Torah is against (knegeg literally means opposed) everything, everything opposes Talmud Torah." Since Torah has the ability to conquer and cure the Yetzer Hora, the resistance rages, internally and externally around it. When a person is about to sit and learn, suddenly everything around is interesting and alluring; the noise outside, the food in the fridge, other people's conversations, you name it! What's going on!?! Kulam Knegeg Talmud Torah!

Likutei Divrei Torah

I once demonstrated to a group of young middle school boys what Jewish weightlifting looks like. I picked up a large volume of the Talmud. That was no problem for someone with my strength and natural athleticism. Then like an Olympian I bent my knees and acted out with great drama the pain and effort that goes into opening up the cover of that volume of the Talmud to begin the learning process.

The hard part is starting! All beginnings are hard! A famous Jewish comedian said, "80% of success is showing up!" There's a dot of truth embedded there. Showing up and starting is the hard part!

Once we begin, we realize how sweet it is, and we may even wonder, "Where have I been all my life." We may forget again between learning sessions. Then we have to begin again. The hard part, Rashi reminds us, is there in the beginning.

Rebbe Nachman said that sometimes you have to begin many times, and sometimes many times in the same day and all those beginnings are hard too, but it's always worth it!

Yeshivat Har Etzion: Virtual Bet Midrash

Nothing Happens By Chance

Harav Mosheh Lichtenstein

A PLEA, RATHER THAN A CONSOLATION
The haftara for Behar-Bechukotai, as is the case with the other double parashiyot, is the haftara of the second parasha. We, therefore, read this week the haftara for Bechukotai, which is taken from the book of Yirmiyahu (16:19-17:14). The core of Parashat Bechukotai is the rebuke, and the haftara serves as a response to that reproach. The haftara's opening words – "O Lord, my strength, and my stronghold, and my refuge in the day of affliction" (16:19) – prepare us for a prophecy of consolation. But the continuation of the haftara includes a harsh reproach, and even the concluding verse – "Heal me, O Lord, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved: for You are my praise" (17:14) – does not describe consolation and redemption, but merely expresses a wish and a desire for salvation and healing that are not yet visible on the horizon. Even at the end of the haftara, then, we still find ourselves far from salvation, which fails to arrive. The truth is that anyone who follows the reading of the haftara in the synagogue from a complete Tanakh, rather than from a Chumash, will be surprised to discover that the final verse of the haftara is actually the opening verse of a new section. In its context in the book of Yirmiyahu, the plea for healing and salvation is uttered out of distress and persecution, and as part of Yirmiyahu's bitter struggle with the people of his generation. It does not herald salvation, but rather it is a petition and prayer in anticipation of continued struggle and troubles.

REACTION IN A TIME OF TROUBLE - It should, then, be understood that the haftara is not one of consolation in the classical sense, that it

does not come to describe a rosy future that will replace the gloomy present, and that we must understand its goal in a different manner. If we come to summarize its message in a single word, it is trust.

Over the course of the parasha, the Torah describes the ups and downs that will befall the people in the wake of their actions. God will bring upon them a sword that will avenge His covenant and make them flee before their enemies, and at the end of the parasha, we are told that He will return them to the desolate land in the wake of the covenant that had been made with their forefathers. All this is described at length in the section of the reproach. One component, however, is missing, namely, man's reaction and response. We hear nothing about the relationship between Israel and God in the wake of the troubles that will befall them. This is the point that the haftara comes to fill in, as a guide and model for response in times of affliction.

It is important to emphasize the haftara's place in the framework of the book of Yirmiyahu. It is found not in the context of chapters of consolation, but rather in the very heart of a series of chapters of harsh and threatening reproach. To illustrate this, let us cite a few verses from the beginning of chapter 16, the same chapter from which the haftara is taken: For thus says the Lord concerning the sons and concerning the daughters that are born in this place, and concerning their mothers that bore them, and concerning their fathers that begot them in this land.

They shall die of grievous deaths; they shall not be lamented; neither shall they be buried; but they shall be as dung upon the face of the earth: and they shall be consumed by the sword, and by famine; and their carcasses shall be food for the birds of the sky, and for the beasts of the earth.

For thus says the Lord, Enter not into the house of mourning, neither go to lament nor bemoan them: for I have taken away My peace from this people, says the Lord, both love and mercy.

Both the great and the small shall die in this land: they shall not be buried, neither shall men lament for them, nor gash themselves, nor make themselves bald for them: neither shall men break bread for them during the mourning, to comfort him for the dead; neither shall men give them the cup of consolation to drink for his father or for his mother.

You shall also not go into the house of feasting, to sit with them to eat and to drink.

For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will cause to cease out of this place before your eyes, and in your days, the voice of mirth, and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom, and the voice of the bride. (Yirmiyahu 16:3-9)

The prophet's expression of the feeling that God is his strength and stronghold does not come against the backdrop of success and rescue, but out of the depths of crisis and threat, and here lies its significance.

TRUST, AND NOT OPTIMISM

At this point, let us cite the words of the Chazon Ish regarding trust: An old mistake has settled in the hearts of many with respect to the idea of trust. The term bitachon, "trust," which describes a meritorious and essential quality among the

pious, has come to be understood as an obligation to believe – in any situation where a person stands before an unknown future, and there are two possible future outcomes, one good and one not – that surely it will turn out well, and that if he remains in doubt, and worries about the opposite result, he lacks trust. This understanding of trust is incorrect, for as long as the future has not been clarified through a prophetic vision, it is not decided, for who knows God's judgments. But the idea of trust is to believe that nothing in the world happens by chance, and that whatever happens under the sun is all by God's decree.

The gist of what he says is that trust in God does not mean optimism that God will only do nice things for a person, but rather trust that whatever will happen to him is most appropriate for him, and that it will be done because of God's relationship with him. In words, it is not that I am confident that God will act in a particular way on my behalf, but rather I trust in God and in His judgment.

This quality of trust in God despite the punishment and the price that He extracts fits in well with the words of Yirmiyahu, which come in response to the difficult reality of his time. "God is my strength and My stronghold" despite the fact that mirth will cease and people will die – this is the message of our haftara. This is why the haftara opens with an expression of trust, continues with a description of sin and its punishment, and concludes with another expression of trust.

THE HAFTARAH IS BUILT IN PIECES

When we come to examine the haftara, we see that that it is composed of a series of sections. It is comprised of several units of short prophecies which are set apart in a Tanakh as parashiyot setumot. Moreover, there are sharp transitions from third person to first person, and the reverse. Thus, for example, the opening verse refers to God in the third person, expressing man's desire to rely on God – "O Lord, My strength, and my stronghold, and my refuge in the day of affliction" – whereas the third verse is formulated in the first person as the words of God – "Therefore, behold, I will make known to them this once, I will cause them to know My hand and My might; and they shall know that My name is the Lord." Thus, we see that in the same prophetic vision, we encounter a prophet who speaks in the name of man and from a human perspective, and a prophet who speaks in the name of God. The continuation of the haftara follows a similar pattern. Some verses are formulated in the first person as stated by God, whereas in other verses the prophet speaks directly to God or else he talks about Him in the third person. The end of the haftara brings us back to verses uttered by the prophet and directed to God as a person who relies upon Him, expresses his trust in Him, and awaits His salvation:

O Lord, the hope of Israel, all that forsake You shall be ashamed, and they who depart from me shall be written in the earth, because they have forsaken the Lord, the fountain of living waters. Heal me, O Lord, and I shall be healed; save me,

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and I shall be saved: for You are my praise. (17:13-14)

What follows from all this is that the haftara combines a prophecy of rebuke from God, on the one hand, and verses of hope and trust on the part of the prophet, on the other. The haftara opens and closes with statements expressing man's reliance on God, and it seems that they constitute the essence of the haftara. The prophecies of rebuke in the middle provide the background for man's expression of trust, but the primary message for us lies in man's expression of trust in times of affliction and difficulties. Therefore, were a person to hear the beginning of the haftara, doze off in the middle, and wake up toward the end, we could say that he has received the primary message of the haftara of Bechukotai, because the essence of the haftara is man's expression of trust in God.

CONNECTION OR ABANDONMENT

If we examine the concluding verses, we will immediately discern that the final verse is a call from man to God and an expression of his hope for salvation. Expression is thereby given to the continued connection between the prophet and his Maker, despite the troubles, and to his trust that God is the address regarding his difficulties. But this verse expresses hope in a better future and thus it exemplifies less the point that we have emphasized. In contrast, the two previous verses – which belong, from the perspective of the structure of the chapter, to the reproach that precedes them, as opposed to the final verse which in the prophetic source relates to what follows – well express what we said above. The prophet presents man with two alternatives: continued cleaving to God and trusting in Him, which at some point in the future will be translated into salvation from trouble, or else abandoning him. Connection or abandonment – this is the choice that a person must decide between in a time of crisis.

The verse, "A glorious throne exalted from the beginning is the place of our sanctuary" (17:12) is difficult, and its meaning is not self-evident. It is not even clear whether it is a continuation of God's words in the previous verses, or else the words of the prophet in his capacity as representative of man in the following verses. For our purposes, we shall follow in the footsteps of those commentators who see the verse as pointing to the deep and eternal connection between God and the people of Israel that exists at all times.[1] The prophet's expression of trust in the throne of glory, even in a time of trouble, is the quality of trust that the haftara comes to express.

In this context, we must relate to the verses in the middle of the haftara that relate directly to the quality of trust: Thus says the Lord; Cursed be the man who trusts in man, and makes flesh his arm, and whose heart departs from the Lord. For he shall be like the juniper tree in the desert, and shall not see when good comes; but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, a salt land and not inhabited.

Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is.

For He shall be like a tree planted by the waters, and that spreads out its roots by the river, and

shall not be anxious in the year of drought, nor shall it cease from yielding fruit. (17:5-8)

The verses illustrate our assertion that the quality of trust constitutes the essence of the haftara, and they are well integrated into this framework. On the other hand, they seem to contradict the Chazon Ish's argument cited earlier, for they describe the success promised to him who trusts in God and the failure that awaits him who puts his trust in flesh and blood. Thus, a certain clarification must be added. We have already noted the transitions found throughout the haftara between the words of man and the words of God. These verses are stated by God, and they express the recompense that awaits those who do His word and those who violate His will. As part of His providence, God will indeed reward him who trusts in Him and disconcert him who trusts in man; this is the promise given in these verses. This, however, must not be the foundation for man's trust in God.

A RELATIONSHIP OF TRUST

The trust expected of man is trust in God as part of the relationship between them, and not the expectation of receiving a reward. Thus, it exists in times of crisis as in times of joy, and its significance in the haftara is precisely in the use that Yirmiyahu makes of it in times of trouble. God, from His perspective, promises reward to those who trust in Him. From man's perspective, as well, a good relationship of trust in God is supposed to give rise to reward and salvation, but this is not the essence of trust, but rather one its side effects.

If there is closeness between man and God, then in the absence of other considerations, God will want to confer good upon man, owing to the nearness between them. Therefore, trust gives rise to hope in salvation, but this is all conditioned on the absence of other considerations of providence. As soon as there are other considerations, they can cause God not to confer good upon His people. This may be likened to the parent-child relationship. In the absence of prophylactic educational considerations, a parent will want to bestow good upon his child and give him presents and candy, and thus give expression to his love. However, various considerations often enter into the picture and bring the parent to decide not to reward his child. This does not testify to a lack of love, but rather to a more complicated situation regarding the child's world and his parent's attitude toward him. A wise and mature child will continue to put his trust in his parents, even if they don't provide him with his every desire. This is also true regarding the relationship between man and God.

It should be noted that the prophet likens one who trusts in God to a blossoming tree, and, it should be remembered, a tree is planted for what it will produce over the long term and it is not meant to yield immediate results.

THE WAR AGAINST CHANCE

Besides the very expression of trust that constitutes the essence of our haftara, it is important to emphasize another point that connects the haftara to the parasha. The primary battle being fought in the parasha is that between providence and chance. The main struggle is

with the idea that everything happens by chance, rather than with idolatry in and of itself. A famous expression of the attitude that bursts forth from these verses, and the battle against it, is given by the Rambam:

This is one of the paths to repentance, for when trouble arrives and people cry out and shout, they will all know that it is on account of their evil deeds that evil befell them. As it is written: "Your iniquities have turned away [these things]" (Yirmiyahu 5:25). And this will cause them to remove the trouble. But if they do not cry out and shout, but rather they say that this befell us because such is the world and this trouble was by chance, this is a path of cruelty and it causes them to cling to their evil deeds, and it leads to other troubles. This is what is written in the Torah: "... and you walk contrary to Me, then I will walk contrary to you also in fury" (Vayikra 26:27-28). That is to say, when I bring trouble upon you so that you should repent, if you say that it is by chance, I will add fury. (Hilkhot Ta'aniyot 1:3)

In general, Yirmiyahu does not fight against this attitude, but rather he fights against those who abandon God in favor of idolatry. One who worships an idol does not necessarily deny spiritual providence over the world, but rather he attributes it to false gods. The issue of trust in God versus reliance on man does not even arise, because the question is not whether to trust, but in whom to trust. Our haftara relates to idol worship, but it also struggles with the abandonment of God owing to the feeling that the world is a place of chance, and therefore a person must put his trust exclusively in man. The words of the prophet who is aware of this problem bring him to emphasize the importance of trust in God as He who runs man's world and they are appropriate for the parasha of rebuke which deals with the same issue.

We can now say that the gist of the haftara lies in its expression of the quality of trust. And this in a twofold sense:

- 1) The trust in providence as opposed to chance and human causality.
- 2) The importance of trust in God in times of crisis.

These two messages make this prophecy a most appropriate choice as the haftara for the parasha of rebuke.

(Translated by David Strauss)

[1] There are those who understand that the throne of glory which is the place of our sanctuary refers to God's connection to man and the resting of His Shekhina upon him. According to this, the Mikdash serves as proof for providence and to God's involvement in man's world, and there is no need to limit this to the period during which the Mikdash stands. According to another understanding, the throne of glory [God's revelation to man] stands above time and history ("exalted from the beginning"), and therefore it is the true place of the sanctuary, for the connection between man and God will remain forever, and it is not impaired by the vicissitudes of time.

Likutei Divrei Torah

Rabbi Dr. Norman J. Lamm's

Derashot Ledorot

In This Hour of Crisis (1967)

This is an hour of crisis, not only for Israel as a State but for Israel as a people. [1]

Our destiny, and the destiny of our children and children's children after us, is being forged by the soldiers of Israel on lonely outposts in the Gaza strip and on the heights overlooking the Gulf of Aqaba. [2]

No Jew can afford to look upon the tense situation as an outsider. As Mordecai the Jew said to Queen Esther, highly placed in non-Jewish society and politics, *al tedami be'nafshekh le'himalet beit avikh* – do not imagine that you will find safety whilst danger befalls the rest of the House of Israel.

The Arab guns aimed at the heart of the State are aimed at our hearts. The stranglehold on the Gulf of Aqaba, the lifeline of the medinah, is a stranglehold on our throats. And the Russian contempt for the State of Israel bespeaks the old, traditional Russian contempt for all of us as Jews.

How ought we react in this grave hour? How have Jews always and should Jews now react? The archetypal and symbolic confrontation between Israel and its enemies was that between Jacob and Esau. When Jacob, surrounded by his wives and children and his retinue, heard that the armed columns of Esau were marching towards him with vengeance in their hearts, the Rabbis tell us that he prepared a threefold strategy: *le'tefillah*, *le'doron*, *u-le'milhamah*, he prepared himself for prayer, or gifts, and for war. It is this threefold approach that must become the pattern for our attitude as well.

The *doron*, or gift, that Jacob presented to his brother was a form of legitimate appeasement of a bloodthirsty aggressor, in an attempt to turn his hatred into good will. Indeed, it happened to work with Jacob. But it cannot work for Israel today. First, you cannot placate an enemy who is implacable. Those of us who saw King Faisal on television two days ago heard him declare his avowed intention of exterminating Israel, and President Nasser said the same thing yesterday. Nothing less than that would satisfy our enemies. Moreover, Israel has nothing left to give. It has given all but the bare skeletal structure necessary for the survival of a modern country.

Hence, our *doron* must be the gift that we American Jews are going to give to the Jews and the government of the State of Israel; in other words, our accelerated participation in that great and historic venture known as the UJA. No Jew who fails to give, and to significantly increase his pledge over the past, has a moral right to be proud that he is a Jew. This year Israel faces unusual economic difficulty; the present fall-off in tourism, together with the stupendous military expenditures that it must undertake, make the situation and the need grave indeed. Those who will therefore give this year far in excess of what they gave in the past, and far in excess of what they are able to give, will be performing an invaluable service. Those who do not do so are, with all their talk, valueless for Israel. Their talk, their worry, their advice, their concern, their pride, their keeping their ears glued to the radio – all this is meaningless! The Jewish Center Family will have an opportunity on June 7 [3] to demonstrate the extent of its commitment. I should like to see an enthusiastic response like never before. It behooves us to give our *doron* before we are solicited, and to prepare a gift that will tell Israel that we have not altered, and all the world that Israel does not stand alone.

The second part of that strategy is milhamah, war. Can we participate in milhamah if it should be necessary?

Yes we can, and yes it is necessary. There are many ways to fight a war, many fronts, and many weapons. Our contribution, though not military, must not be under-estimated. For one thing, we must undertake an indefatigable political campaign. As members of a subculture in this great democracy, it is entirely proper that we make our opinion felt where such opinions carry weight. We must undertake to inform, by letter and telegram, our President that we support his support of Israel, and to tell him as well as our Senators and Representatives that it was at the urging of an American Secretary of State that Israel gave up much of its precious victory in Sinai, and that the United States has treaty obligations to Israel. @This is one campaign in which we can participate immediately after the Sabbath is over.

Another way of making our political influence felt, in a more social manner, will come tomorrow morning when we shall participate physically in demonstrating our support for the State of Israel. We must all take our families and be present at the "Salute to Israel Parade." Even more directly, our young people can volunteer to help in Israel. Let them be encouraged. American law forbids military service on behalf of a foreign power. But there is much urgent work to be done, taking the places of Israel's men and women who have been pressed into military service. People are urgently needed, and young people should by all means participate in the "Summer Work in Israel" program which has now been expanded, and in the "Sherut La'am" which offers one or two years of service in Israel. The medical services and all other specialties are urgently needed; but Israel even needs people just to dig trenches and build shelters.

So far, it is good to report that results have been most encouraging. Let no one henceforth speak flippantly of "the vanishing Jews of America!" The volunteer offers have been extremely heartening. I am told that only yesterday a surgeon called from San Francisco to New York to offer his services provided that his two sons would be taken with him. Of particular interest to this congregation is the fact that a brief notice pinned on the bulletin board at Yeshiva University produced, in 36 hours, more than 300 volunteers! I myself have been on the phone with a number of students, including a number of young ladies, from Yavneh, who have asked my intercession with their families to permit them to go forthwith to Israel.[4] There is something ineffably precious about the Jewish soul which allows it to express its idealism so immediately and so openly. Each in his own way, therefore, can participate in this great milhamah.

We are an irenic, peace-loving people. Our hopes and prayers are for peace not only for us but for the entire world. The author of "Or ha-Hayyim" has made this comment in a beautiful interpretation of a verse in today's Sidra. We read vi'yeshavtem la-vetah be'artzekhem, "And ye shall dwell securely in your land," followed by ve'natati shalom ba-aretz, "And I shall give peace to the land." But, asks the "Or ha-Hayyim," if we already are told that God will let us dwell securely in our land, surely that includes peace, and why then repeat the promise that God will give peace to the land? In his answer he distinguishes between artzekhem and eretz: the first verse refers to security in artzekhem, "your land," which means the Land of Israel. The second verse, however, refers to the granting of peace in eretz, which should be translated not "the land," but "the

world!" In addition to our own national security, we are committed to the great hope and striving for peace throughout the world.

However, when duty and destiny call upon us to work so that others might bear arms on behalf of Israel, or even, if need be, that we do so ourselves, we shall not be found hesitating or faltering! If we were a nation like unto other nations, this fight would still be noble, but natural. Our existence is at stake, and we shall not submit to the murderous ambitions of that Hitler of the Nile.[5]

But Israel is more than that. The creation of the State of Israel was the minimum act by the powers of the world by which they salvaged the barest trace of human dignity left to them. Israel is a state conceived in the ghettos of Europe, born in the death camps of Auschwitz and Treblinka, delivered in the detention camps of Cyprus, and swaddled in the rags by which the Western powers blindfolded themselves to our agony and stuffed their ears not to hear our cry of anguish.

Israel is a penance paid by Russia for Babi Yar, by England for the Struma,[6] by the United States for its refusal to hear the cry of the refugees in time, by the Catholic countries for the silence of the Deputy Pope, by each and every country for its own public and private crimes against the people of the Lord. When we shall, therefore, act in defense of Israel, we will be fighting not only for Israel's and our existence, but in effect for the honor of Russia and England and America and France and fall of mankind, whether they know it or not, realize or not, care or not, appreciate it or not, even whether they want it or not. For we shall ever remain, as Yehudah Halevi has called us, the heart of the nations and their conscience.

Tani be'shem Rab Elazar, ha-sayaf ve'ha-sefer nitnu mekorakhin min ha-shamayim. The word and the Book were given wrapped together from Heaven. We have given the world its sefer, its Book. We shall, if need be, now defend the sefer, and the am ha-sefer (People of the Book) with a sayaf (sword) of courage and honor. For that charge and that mission is min-hashamayim, decreed from Heaven!

Finally, the third element in this Jewish strategy first taught by Jacob is tefillah, prayer. We can perform that by keeping the present situation in mind every time we speak, in our tefillot, of Jerusalem and Zion. In addition, we shall at the conclusion of services today recite special prayers for the welfare of the State of Israel.

But wedded to prayer is the concept of hope. Our prayer and our outlook must always be hopeful, never desperate.

I would like to commend to your attention an insight which speaks not only of hope but offers a perspective that goes far beyond that parochial limits of power politics. Our Sidra, in enumerating the blessings God promises us, says: u-faniti alekhem, "and I shall turn to you," ve'hifreti etkhem ve'hirbeti etkhem..., "and I shall increase you, and make you fruitful, and keep My covenant with you."

On the words u-faniti alekhem, "I shall turn to you," Rashi quotes the sages: Ipaneh mi-kol asakai le'shalem sekharkhem, "I shall turn away from all My other preoccupations in order to grant you your reward."

What a strange remark! Are we really to take that so anthropomorphically, so primitively? Is God "busy" with other matters so that He has to take "time off" in order to pay loving attention to us?

An answer is provided to us by Rabbi Mordecai Rogov of Chicago, in his work "Ateret Mordecai." He points to the Midrash which states in the name of Rabbi Samuel b. Nachman, that God says: ki anokhi

Likutei Divrei Torah

yadati et ha-mahshavot, for I know the thoughts of all men. Applying that to the story of Joseph and his brothers, the Midrash tells us that the brothers were preoccupied with the selling of Joseph, Joseph was busy bemoaning his own bitter fate, Judah was involved in looking for a wife – but ve'ha-Kadosh barukh Hu hayah asuk be'oro shel Mashiah, all this while, God was preoccupied with the light of the Messiah! Each of the actors in the great drama thought that he knew the whole story. The brothers saw this as an act of vengeance, Joseph as a bitter tragedy that had reached its nadir, Judah was altogether distracted by an extraneous matter.

None of them really saw the entire episode in its true, ultimate perspective. None of them realized that God was not "busy" moving affairs as he individually saw it, but that the Almighty was simply making preparations for the ultimate development of Jewish history, leading to the final redemption. The Joseph story, even more than others, reveals how human intention and Divine design can sometimes be utterly different and yet mesh with each other, and how the Divine plan often uses humans who do not even appreciate the role that they play.

Man, by virtue of his natural human limitations, can see only a segment of reality and experience. But if man is wise, he recognizes this, and he understands that beyond his own comprehension there is a God Whose own designs defy our pitiful human attempts at probing His mysteries. We are all actors who play significant roles in a great drama; but few of us ever have any inkling of the extent and direction of the plot.

So it is with the current episode. Today the Arabs are thinking of a quick victory. Russia sees the entire incident as a chance to dislodge the United States from Vietnam. Israel views it as one great crisis that must be overcome. The United States considers it as an added complication forcing it to juggle both Near-Eastern and Far-Eastern commitments. The United Nations regards it as a need to make up for U Thant's blunder, the biggest in the history of diplomacy.

But our hope and our confidence is that God will take "time out" from these individual considerations of the protagonists of the drama and ultimately reveal to us His true preoccupation: ve'ha-Kadosh barukh Hu hayah asuk be'oro shel Mashiah, that Almighty God is weaving all these political and military strands into the garment of light that the Messiah will wear, into the intricate designs by which there will come to Israel and all the world the geulah shelemah, the complete redemption.

May, indeed, all our heartache and anxiety, all our worry and preparation for war, be transcended by the yeshuah, by the great victory and salvation which will come, speedily in our day. Ve'shalom al Yisrael – and may peace arrive for Israel and all mankind.

1 Ed. note: This sermon was delivered just days before the outbreak of the Six Day War.

2 Ed. note: Egyptian President Nasser's decisions to ask for the removal of the UN peacekeepers from Sinai and especially to block the Gulf of Aqaba to Israeli shipping via the Straits of Tiran are commonly accepted as the point where war became inevitable.

3 Ed. note: Rabbi Lamm refers here to the Salute to Israel Parade, now called the Celebrate Israel Parade.

4 Ed. note: Yavneh was an Orthodox college student group. Rabbi Lamm served as the organization's chairman for a number of years.

5 Ed. note: This reference is to the leadership of Egypt (Nasser).

6 Ed. note: The Struma disaster was the sinking on 24 February 1942 of a ship, MV Struma, which had been trying to take nearly 800 Jewish refugees from the Axis member Romania to Mandatory Palestine. After the ship failed, British diplomats and Turkish officials negotiated over the fate of the passengers. Because of Arab and Jewish unrest in Palestine, the British government was determined to apply the terms of the White Paper of 1939 to minimize Jewish immigration to Palestine. British diplomats urged the Turkish government of Refik Saydam to prevent Struma from continuing her voyage. When the Turks denied its entry and the British forbade it from proceeding to Palestine, the unseaworthy vessel was forced to leave harbor. The Turkish authorities abandoned the ship in the Black Sea, about 10 miles north of the Bosphorus, where she drifted helplessly. On the morning of 24 February there was a huge explosion, and the ship sank. Many years later it was revealed that the ship had been torpedoed by the USSR.

7 Ed. note: Then-Secretary General of the United Nations U Thant was widely criticized for acceding to Egypt's May 1967 demand that UN peacekeeping troops evacuate Egypt, opening the door to war.



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INTERNET PARSHA SHEET ON BEHAR – BECHUKOSAI - 5786

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RAV SCHACHTER ON THE PARSHA Insights and Commentary

Based on the Shiurim of Rav Hershel Schachter

Adapted by Dr. Allan Weissman

<https://tinyurl.com/RavSchachterontheParsha> Reprinted with

permission from Dr. Weissman

BRIS AVOS AND BRIS SINAI

וזכרתי את בריתי יעקוב ואף את בריתי יצחק ואף את בריתי אברהם אזכר והארץ אזכר. והארץ תעזוב מהם ותרץ את שבתתיה בהשמה מהם והם ירצו את עונם יען וביען במשפטי מאסו ואת חקתי געלה נפשם. ואף גם זאת בהיותם בארץ איביהם לא מאסתי ולא געלתי לכלתם להפר בריתי אתם כי אני ה' אלק-יהם.

"I will remember My covenant with Yaakov, and also My covenant with Yitzchak, and also My covenant with Avraham will I remember, and I will remember the Land". "The Land will be bereft of them, because they were revolted by My ordinances and because their spirit rejected My decrees". "But despite all this, while they will be in the

land of their enemies, I won't have been revolted by them nor will I have rejected them to obliterate them, to annul My covenant with them. I will remember for them the covenant of the ancients, those whom I have taken out of the land of Egypt before the eyes of the nations, to be G-d unto them". These verses are from Vayikra 26:42-45. On many occasions, Rav Soloveitchik explained that Hashem made two brisos, or covenants, with the Jewish People. He made a bris with Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, and He made a second bris at Har Sinai. The tochechah in Bechukosai represents that second kerisas bris, and it was proclaimed on the occasion of Ma'amad Har Sinaiafter the Aseres HaDibros. As the tochechah concludes, these are the decrees, the ordinances, and the teachings that Hashem gave between Himself and Bnei Yisrael at Har Sinai. The pessukim cited above appear at the conclusion of the tochechah. The first passuk in the series, describing Hashem's remembering the bris that He made with Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, is undoubtedly a great source of comfort for the Jewish People. Yet, that bris doesn't serve as the basis of redemption of the Jewish People, as this passuk is immediately followed by further admonition. Apparently, the ultimate ge'ulah is granted only on the strength of the second bris made with those who left Mitzrayim. Following an analysis of the different brisos, the Rav suggested an interpretation to clarify the sequence of these pessukim. The Ramban offers a well-known solution to the problem of the apparent breach of Torah law committed by Yaakov when he married two sisters. The Ramban writes that Yaakov, like his father and grandfather, observed the laws of the Torah on a voluntary basis. However, his observance was limited to when he was in Eretz Yisrael, and that's why he didn't refrain from marrying Rachel and Leah in chutz la'Aretz. The Ramban adds that Hashem arranged that Rachel died on the road upon Yaakov's entry to Eretz Yisrael so that Yaakov wouldn't reside in the Land with two sisters as wives. This is also the Ramban's explanation for why Yaakov didn't bury Rachel alongside Leah in Me'aras HaMachpeilah. In the words of the Ramban, he would be ashamed before his forefathers, lest it appear to his ancestors that even in Eretz Yisrael he still regarded both women as his wives. It was Leah who was entitled to burial in Me'aras HaMachpeilah because she was the one married to him first permissibly. The Rav suggested that the basis for the Ramban's assertion is the passuk in the aftermath of the Bris Bein HaBesarim. "I will establish My covenant between Me and you and between your offspring after you and I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojourns, the whole of the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession, and I shall be a G-d to them". In this passuk, the bris that Hashem sealed with each of the Avos is clearly linked with Eretz Yisrael. From the perspective of the Bris Avos, kedushas Yisrael and kedushas ha'Aretz are inseparable. The Rav understood this position in the context of a discussion of the Mishneh LaMelech as to whether the halachic status of the Avos before Mattan Torah was that of a ben Noach or that of a Yisrael. The Ramban maintains that the resolution to this question involves a compromise position, and the Avos did indeed leave the status of bnei Noach, but only when they resided in Eretz Yisrael, not when they were in chutz la'Aretz. The Rav explained that initially, in the time of the Avos, Avraham's family was selected as the chosen mishpachah. According to the Ramban, the bris signifying the bechirah of mishpachas Yisrael is dependent on residing specifically in Eretz Yisrael. Since

the full measure of kedushas Yisrael granted to the Avos by means of the Bris Avos was restricted to Eretz Yisrael, when Yaakov returned to Eretz Yisrael and attained the full status of "Yisrael," Rachel had to die so that he wouldn't be married to two sisters. In contrast to the bechirah of mishpachas Yisrael, the bris associated with Mattan Torah was sealed with the Jewish Nation, and on that occasion upon acceptance of the full weight of the taryag mitzvos, the Jewish People became the Chosen Nation. This was a fulfillment of Hashem's words to Moshe even before yetzi'as Mitzrayim, "I shall take you to Me for a People". Indeed, as Rav Soloveitchik was fond of quoting from Rav Sa'adyah Gaon's Emunos VeDe'os, "Our nation isn't a nation except through her Torah". Unlike the Bris Avos, the Bris Sinai forged between Hashem and Am Yisrael isn't restricted to Eretz Yisrael. It binds the Jewish People to Hashem and His Torah wherever the nation may find itself. As proof, the Rav cited the passuk stated in anticipation of Ma'amad Har Sinai. "And now, if you hearken well to Me and observe My covenant, you shall be to Me the most beloved treasure of all peoples, for Mine is the entire world". From the perspective of Bris Sinai, a Jew's kedushah stays with him wherever he is. It's above time and place. Rav Soloveitchik elaborated on the enduring impact of the Bris Avos based on a comment of the Gemara in Kesubos. "Whoever dwells in Eretz Yisrael is considered to be one who has a G-d, and whoever dwells outside the Land is considered to be one who has no G-d". He explained that we find many pessukim in the Torah that demonstrate that the Bris Avos was never replaced or superseded by the Bris Sinai. For example, in the passuk at the conclusion of the tochechah, Hashem alludes to the earlier bris even after the broader Bris Sinai was sealed. In other words, even after the Bris Sinai, the Bris Avos remains in effect and can serve as a source of kedushas Yisrael. It emerges that a Jew who resides in Eretz Yisrael may be labeled with both kedushas Avos and kedushas Sinai, whereas a Jew in chutz la'Aretz must suffice with merely the single kedushas Sinai. He lacks the kedushas Yisrael of the Bris Avos, which is bound to kedushas ha'Aretz. This may be what Chazal allude to in stating that a Jew in chutz la'Aretz is "like one who has no G-d". The Rav noted that there are certain mitzvos that only apply in Eretz Yisrael because they're strictly agricultural in nature. However, there are other mitzvos, such as eglah arufah, semichah, and kiddush hachodesh, that are unrelated to the land per se, yet nevertheless only apply in Eretz Yisrael. When the Rambam cites the halachah that semichah may only be conferred in Eretz Yisrael, he writes that all of Eretz Yisrael that was settled by the olei Mitzrayim is fit for semichah. This is most surprising, because we generally assume that the kedushah rishonah bestowed at the time of Yehoshua was nullified. Only those areas endowed with kedushah through the subsequent kedushah sheniyah at the time of Ezra currently possess kedushas ha'Aretz. Thus, the boundaries acceptable for conferring semichah should have been limited to the areas settled by the olei Bavel, for only that land enjoys kedushas ha'Aretz. The Radvaz explains the Rambam by distinguishing between two distinct aspects of the uniqueness of Eretz Yisrael. Using the terminology of Rav Moshe Soloveitchik, Eretz Yisrael possesses a kedushas ha'Aretz necessary for the application of the mitzvos hateluyos ba'Aretz, such as terumos and ma'asros. In addition, we recognize the concept of shem Eretz Yisrael, the status of Eretz Yisrael. The Rambam in this ruling teaches that the shem Eretz Yisrael applies to any land that was once

sanctified with kedushas ha'Aretz, even if it no longer possesses that kedushah. It's specifically in the land that acquired a shem Eretz Yisrael in which semichah may be conferred. The connection between the mitzvos hateluyos ba'Aretz and kedushas ha'Aretz is clear. These obligations only devolve on produce that grew in a land endowed with the kedushah of Eretz Yisrael. This isn't the case, however, for eglah arufah, semichah, and kiddush hachodesh. As mentioned, these have no connection to kedushas Eretz Yisrael, only to shem Eretz Yisrael. The restriction of these mitzvos to Eretz Yisrael isn't a function of the land of Eretz Yisrael, but rather the person who lives in Eretz Yisrael. These mitzvos may not be fulfilled in chutz la'Aretz because a Jew in chutz la'Aretz lacks the kedushah of the Bris Avos. In light of the preceding analysis, the Rav clarified the sequence of the pessukim at the conclusion of the tochechah. The first passuk in the series is a reference to the Bris Avos and its relationship to Eretz Yisrael. As we noted earlier, this bris is restricted to the Jew in Eretz Yisrael, and it lacks the capacity to redeem the Jew who has been exiled. Thus, despite Hashem's remembering the Bris Avos, the Torah immediately records additional pessukim of admonition, which describe further transgression and galus. What, then, is the basis of this consolation and the ultimate redemption of the Jewish People?. The next passuk provides the answer. Even in galus when the Bris Avos ceases to function, Hashem still remembers the Bris Sinai that was sealed with those whom He has taken out of the land of Egypt. The bris with the Jewish Nation is universal. It remains intact in chutz la'Aretz, no matter where the Jewish People go, and it's that bris that ensures the redemption of the Jewish People from galus.

These insights and commentary on Parshas Bechukosai, discussing Bris Avos and Bris Sinai, are drawn from the shiurim of Rav Hershel Schachter and adapted by Dr. Allan Weissman.

from: **Rabbi Yissocher Frand** <ryfrand@torah.org>

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date: May 7, 2026, 2:26 PM

subject: Rav Frand - Shemita + Har Sinai + Lashon Racha = Unity

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: #1380 – Can One Be Obligated to Bentsh Even If He Didn't Eat? Good Shabbos!

The pasuk in Parshas Behar says, "And Hashem spoke to Moshe on Har Sinai, saying" (Vayikra 25:1). In perhaps the most famous comment in all of his Chumash commentary, Rashi asks why the Torah specifically mentions that the halachos of shemita were given on Har Sinai. Rashi articulates it: Mah inyan shemita eitzel Har Sinai? Weren't all the mitzvos given at Sinai?

(I am told that there was an American television program that was playing in Israel with Hebrew subtitles. One of the actors in the television show said "What does that have to do with the price of tea in China?" The subtitle was "Mah inyan shemita eitzel Har Sinai?" When I say this is a famous Rashi – it is a famous Rashi!)

Rashi answers that just like both the generalities and the details of the halachos of shemita were said at Har Sinai, so too, both the generalities and details of all the other mitzvos were said at Har Sinai as well. Shemita is the paradigm. Just like the Torah elaborates about this mitzva in all its details, the same is true for every mitzva. Even though by other mitzvos, the Torah may not explicitly elaborate on

the details, they were all given over to Moshe on Har Sinai.

I want to offer perhaps a different answer to Rashi's question of "Mah inyan shemita eitzel Har Sinai?" in the name of the Sefas Emes: I will refer to that as our first question.

The Medrash Rabba in Vayikra (33:1) quotes a later pasuk in our parsha: "When you sell an item to your friend or you purchase from the hand of your fellow man, one man should not cheat his brother." (Vayikra 25:14) The problem is that the Medrash quotes its citation of this pasuk with the preface: "Vayedaber Hashem el Moshe (b'Har Sinai leimor)" (And Hashem spoke to Moshe). However, there is no such pasuk preceding the prohibition of cheating your fellow man in matters of purchase or sale!

Why is the Medrash connecting the first pasuk in our parsha with a pasuk thirteen pesukim later dealing with cheating? Apparently, the Medrash is trying to attach the first pasuk of the parsha (Vayedaber Hashem el Moshe...) with the subsequent halacha of "When you sell an item to your friend..." Why? That is our second question.

The third question is about the basic words of the Medrash. On the words "If you sell something, don't cheat your friend" the Medrash comments "About this it is written 'Death and life are in the hands of the tongue...'" (Mishlei 18:21) This famous pasuk teaches that the power of speech can mean the difference between life and death. And then the Medrash cites three examples involving the power of speech:

(1) If you blow on a coal, it becomes a raging fire which can be destructive. If you spit on the same piece of coal, it gets extinguished and it won't be destructive. Thus life and death are controlled by one's mouth!

(2) Fruit that is tevel (from which the required priestly and levitical tithes have not been taken): If someone does not proclaim the required portion to be teruma and/or maaser, he will be deserving of death for eating that tevel. If, however, someone verbalizes the separation of teruma and/or maaser from the fruit, it can now be eaten with no problem. Again, the difference between life and death depends on whether you say something or you don't say something.

(3) Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel said to his trusted servant, Tevi: Go buy me the best thing in the market. Tevi brought his master tongue. Later, Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel told Tevi: Go buy me the worst thing in the market. Again, Tevi brought his master tongue. Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel asked his servant – which is it? Is tongue the best thing in the market or is it the worst thing in the market? Tevi responded, it can be the best thing in the world or the worst thing in the world. "Death and life are in the hands of the tongue." If used improperly – to speak lashon hara, that is death at the hands of the tongue. If the same tongue is used to say good about a person or to help a person, that is the best thing in the world.

Then the Medrash says that Rabbi made a festive meal for his students. He brought before them two types of tongue – soft tongue and hard tongue. The students all took the soft pieces of tongue and did not touch the tough pieces. Rabbi told his students: Pay attention to what you have done: Just as you chose for yourselves the soft tongue and did not touch the hard tongue, so too you should treat each other: Speak to one another only with a soft tongue (lashon racha). Be kind, be nice, be complimentary. Don't be tough.

That is why Moshe warns: "When you transact a sale with your fellow or make a purchase from the hand of your fellow, do not aggrieve one another." (Vayikra 25:14) The parsha of 'cheating' in

the Torah is actually teaching us, according to the Medrash: Talk nicely, talk kindly, talk with a soft tongue.

If I had asked you "What is the take away lesson of the parsha of ona'ah (cheating) in the Torah?" would you think that it has anything to do with lashon hara? Probably not. And yet, the Medrash links the parsha of cheating a person in business with the parsha of lashon hara! What is the connection between the two? That is our third question.

The Sefas Emes explains the connection between shemita, speaking nicely, avoiding ona'ah and Har Sinai. He writes the following principle in a couple of places in his Chumash commentary:

Why does the Torah place the parsha of cheating next to the parsha of shemita? The obvious answer is that when someone sells a piece of land, its value is determined based on the number of years remaining until the next yovel (as the land will automatically revert to its original owner when the jubilee year arrives). If there are three years until the next yovel, it is actually no more than a three-year lease. You cannot charge very much. If it is only the fifth year of a yovel cycle, the purchaser has another forty-five years to farm the land. In that case, the seller can receive a lot more money.

So the Torah writes the parsha of cheating right next to the parsha of shemita and yovel because it is trying to emphasize that the "sale" must be transacted based on a fair price (in accordance with the number of years until the next yovel).

The Sefas Emes explains that there is another reason as well. Shemita is all about the achdus (unity) of Klal Yisrael – to make Klal Yisrael one again. One of the more divisive things that inhibits unity amongst people is money: You are rich. I am poor. People in different social-economic groups are often less unified. They live differently, behave differently, etc.

We see this difference in America. There is the "10%" and there is the "90%." It is a fact. However, shemita is the big equalizer. In an agrarian economy, which was the primary economic environment when the Torah was given, if no one is working and everyone is watching their fields lie fallow and they are therefore spending time in the Beis Medrash because there is nothing else to do, that is the big equalizer. The economic divisiveness caused by wealth and poverty is removed, and everyone is now the same.

Part of the reason for shemita is to bring Klal Yisrael together. Therefore, it is no coincidence that the parsha of "cheating" is adjacent to the parsha of shemita.

Another thing that divides people is when one Jew cheats another Jew. There are actually two pesukim related to ona'ah: One relates to ona'as mammon (monetary cheating) and the other to ona'as devorim (hurtful speech). The latter is also mentioned in this parsha. Ona'as devorim is when someone makes a snide, cutting remark – for example, to a ba'al teshuva, "Oh, now you are frum. I remember when you were eating lobster," or to a ger, "I remember your father. He had a big Christmas tree. Now you are so frum?"

The parshios of ona'as mammon and ona'as devorim appear together with shemita in Parshas Behar. This is why the Medrash speaks about lashon racha – soft tongue. The Medrash is teaching that just as cheating in business creates division, so too does hurtful speech. Therefore, it advises us to speak softly and kindly.

The Sefas Emes adds that the Gemara attributes the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash to sinas chinam and bitul shemitos. These are not unrelated aveiros, but two expressions of the same problem. Bitul

“And you see horse and chariot, a nation greater than you”—The yetzer hara shows a person the army he has built through his aveiros (sins). “Look what you’ve done. Look how many failures you have behind you. Look how much impurity and how many destructive forces you created through your actions. You think now you’re suddenly going to change? You think now you’re going to become holy?”

A person wants to grow and take on a kabbalah. He wants to become better. And immediately the yetzer hara whispers: “You? Become better? After everything you’ve done?”

But the Torah says: “Do not fear them.” Why? “Because Hashem, Who took you out of Egypt, is with you.”

The seforim explain that Mitzrayim was not merely physical slavery. Egypt was the lowest spiritual abyss imaginable. Chazal teach that Klal Yisrael had descended to the forty-ninth gate of tumah. Yet Hashem lifted them out and elevated them to become the nation that stood at Har Sinai.

And therefore every Jew must know: if Hashem could take a nation from the depths of Mitzrayim and bring them to kedushah, then no Jew is ever trapped by his past. That is why we mention leaving Egypt every single day. As explained in the Tanya, every day a person must see himself as leaving Mitzrayim anew. Every day a Jew can leave behind his personal constraints, his failures, his addictions, his fears, and his spiritual exile.

Notice the wording of the Pasuk carefully. It does not say merely that Hashem “took you out” of Egypt. It says: “The One Who elevated you out of Egypt.” Hashem does not merely remove a Jew from darkness. He elevates him beyond it.

And this is the great power of teshuvah. The Rambam (Hilchos Teshuvah 2:4) writes that when a person does true teshuvah, he becomes like an entirely new person. The old self no longer defines him. The past no longer possesses him. A Jew is not chained eternally to yesterday.

That is the chizuk every person must carry. No matter where a Jew has fallen, no matter how much the yetzer hara reminds him of his past, he must know that Hashem gave Klal Yisrael the miraculous ability to become new again.

from: Team TorahAnytime <info@torahanytime.com>

date: May 7, 2026, 10:19 PM

subject: Your TorahAnyTimes Parashat Behar Bechukotai is here

A Gem of a Husband

By Rabbi Mordechai Finkelman

There are moments in life when the very assumptions upon which we built our thinking quietly collapse beneath us. Abie Rotenberg’s song ‘The Ring’ is one such example, offering an insightful mussar lesson no less.

A young woman once misplaced her expensive diamond ring during Sheva Berachos following her wedding. The family searched frantically, but the ring could not be found. Her in-laws were deeply distressed. It was a costly piece of jewelry, and beneath the surface hovered the unspoken tension: how could she have been so careless with something so valuable? Quiet strain began creeping into the relationship between the young kallah and her new family.

One winter day, while walking together with his wife, the husband slipped his hand into the pocket of his coat and suddenly exclaimed, “Oh! Look what I found here!” He pulled out the missing diamond

ring and laughed warmly. “This is entirely my fault. I must have absentmindedly placed it in my pocket and forgotten about it.”

The atmosphere transformed instantly. The family laughed. Instead of criticism or embarrassment directed toward the young bride, the incident became an affectionate joke about their son being a distracted “absent-minded professor.” The tension dissolved. The kallah’s dignity was preserved, peace returned to the home, and life moved forward beautifully. They built a family together and raised children lovingly.

Years later, after this devoted husband had passed away, his widow was cleaning through old belongings. Alone in the house, she came across an old suitcase from her days as a kallah and decided to sort through it before discarding it. As she moved around folded clothing and personal items, she suddenly froze.

There, lying inside the suitcase, was the original diamond ring.

At that moment, she realized the truth. Her husband had known all along that she had misplaced the ring. Quietly and without fanfare, he had purchased an identical replacement and orchestrated the entire “discovery” in his coat pocket solely to spare her humiliation and preserve peace within the family. What she had interpreted for years as a humorous accident was, in reality, an extraordinary act of wise sensitivity and selfless love.

An example for us all.

from: **Rabbi Chanan Morrison** <chanan@ravkooktorah.org>

May 22, 2025, 3:23 AM

subject: Rav Kook on Behar: Jubilee - National Reconciliation

Behar: Jubilee - National Reconciliation

Rav Kook Torah

In 1751, the Pennsylvania Assembly ordered a special bell be cast, commemorating the 50th anniversary of William Penn’s “Charter of Privileges.” The Speaker of the Assembly was entrusted with finding an appropriate inscription for what later became famous as the Liberty Bell. The best expression of freedom and equality that the speaker could find was the Biblical verse describing the Jubilee year: “You will blow the shofar on the tenth day of the seventh month; on Yom Kippur you will blow the shofar in all your land. You shall sanctify the fiftieth year, proclaiming freedom to all its inhabitants.” (Lev. 25:9–10)

The triumphant announcement of the Jubilee year, with blasts of the shofar, takes place on the tenth of Tishrei. This date is Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement.

Yet, this is a curious date to announce the new year. The Jubilee year, like any other year, begins on the first of Tishrei, on Rosh Hashanah. Why was the formal proclamation of the Jubilee year postponed until Yom Kippur, ten days later?

National Sabbath Rest. The Jubilee year is a super-Sabbatical year. Like the seventh year, agricultural labor is prohibited, and landowners forego all claims on produce grown during that year. The Jubilee also contains two additional aspects of social justice: the emancipation of slaves and the restoration of land to its original owner.

Just as the Sabbath day allows the individual to rest, so too the Sabbatical and Jubilee years provide rest for the nation. The entire nation is able to take a break from competition and economic struggle. The Sages noted that the phrase “Sabbath to God” appears both in the context of the weekly Sabbath and the Sabbatical year.

Both are designed to direct us towards spiritual growth: the Sabbath on the individual level, and the Sabbatical year on the national level. Healing Rifts in Society. The Talmud in Rosh Hashanah 8b relates that during the first ten days of the Jubilee year, the slaves were not sent home. Nor did they work. They would feast and drink, celebrating their freedom “with crowns upon their heads.” Only after the court blew the shofar on Yom Kippur would the newly freed slaves return home.

The freeing of slaves in the Jubilee year serves as an important safeguard for social order. Societies that rely on slave labor usually suffer from slave revolts and violent acts of vengeance by the underclass.¹

Instead of attaining social justice through bloody revolt and violent upheaval, the Jubilee emancipation allows for peaceful and harmonious social change. The restoration of rights for the poor and disadvantaged becomes an inherent part of the societal and economic order.

Most significantly, during their final days of servitude, the freed slaves celebrate together with their former masters. The Torah also obligates the master to send off his servants with generous presents (מצוות העניקה). These conciliatory acts help heal the social and psychological wounds caused by socio-economic divisions and class estrangement. The national reconciliation reaches its peak on Yom Kippur, when the shofar exuberantly proclaimed freedom and equality.

Atonement for the Nation. Thus, the formal announcement of the Jubilee year is integrally connected to Yom Kippur. On that year, the Day of Atonement becomes a time of forgiveness and absolution, not only for the sins of the individual, but also for the sins of society

from: TorahWeb torahweb@torahweb.org

date: May 6, 2026, 9:48 PM

subject: **Rabbi Ahron Lopiansky - Counting, and Then Some**

Rabbi Ahron Lopiansky - Counting, and Then Some

Parshas Behar starts off with the mitzvah of counting the years until shmitah. Seven years are counted, and the seventh year is actually the shmitah year. We then count again seven cycles of shmitta years, and the fiftieth year is the year of yovel. There seems to be a difference between these two countings. The first counting is seven years that are counted and then the seventh year that we count is itself the sanctified year of shmitah. The Yovel year on the other hand comes after we've finished counting the seven cycles, and after that the fiftieth year is yovel, which we need to establish by proclaiming it. It seems as if our counting did not quite accomplish the ‘yovel’ year. This is eerily reminiscent of the sefira counting, where we count seven weeks of seven days each, and with that our counting is finished. The fiftieth day is then shavous. It seems as if there are two systems in place regarding ‘counting’, which we need to better understand.

One more event reminiscent of this is the yom tov of Sukkos. There are seven days of yom tov, followed by an eighth day which is somewhat connected and yet somewhat disconnected. It seems as if the yom tov proper is seven days and then there is another day of yom tov following our count of seven.

Let us understand the purpose of ‘counting’ as a mitzvah. Counting can be simply a mechanical act of trying to find an aggregate sum. For instance, certain types of halachik “counting” like ziva require

seven days of waiting before one can purify oneself. That “counting” is simply a mechanical noting of how many days and how much time has passed. There is no real act of counting that one is obligated to do; as long as the appropriate time period has elapsed that's good enough.

However, both sefiras haomer and the counting towards the yovel require an active counting. When we have a group of pieces, which will together form a greater entity, we have the act of “counting” as a meaningful establishing of the role of each piece in the greater whole. Thus, when a person is assembling a machine of some sort, and he has individual parts, each part is allocated a description of where it fits into the bigger picture. Thus, every single piece has both its own identity and its role as part of the greater structure. Counting Israel's population is similar. Klal Yisroel consists of twelve distinct tribes, different families in each tribe, and unique individuals in each family. When we count them, we make note of each individual, each family, and their specific tribe, as well as the total of Klal Yisroel. This means that each and every one has a unique place, and together they integrate to form Klal Yisroel. This counting is the way in which we impose the overarching structure so that all the pieces and elements add up to the whole that they're supposed to create.

But then there is a unique phenomenon, where the whole supersedes the sum of its parts. The gemara (Yoma 39a) says that when it comes to the attribute of kedusha, translated loosely as sanctity, a person's actions can never achieve the totality of kedusha. Instead, it says a person does actions that build kedusha in this world, and Hashem endows him with more kedusha from above. The attribute of kedusha required effort on our part, and on top of that an endowment from above. That is how kedusha works. Because kedusha is a quality that really goes beyond our world, it can never be obtained and achieved from within ourselves alone, rather it requires a partnership of our efforts combined with Divine benevolence.

In the Torah, the number seven refers to the totality of our world and existence. The world was created within seven days and therefore the unit of seven days is a description of the totality of human effort and achievement. Whenever the Torah commands us using the number seven, it is there for us to dedicate the totality of our efforts. But then there is another achievement and that is the ‘eighth’ day. It is a day not inherent in our world, but rather endowed from above. It expresses the idea that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. Thus, if we count seven full cycles, then on the fiftieth year we are granted yovel from above. Yovel possesses a sanctity that transcends our world; it takes the process that we've been engaged in, the commerce of buying and selling houses and slaves, and undoes it. It restores the world to its natural order as ordained by the Divine. Shmitah, on the other hand, is still within our world. It is a respite and rest from activity but it's not a reversal of the natural economic order.

The same is true of Shavous. Torah is a set of behaviors, that first of all is meant to bring out the best of our accomplishments in this world. A person is supposed to achieve and attain the best character possible to be developed within this world. And thus, we count forty-nine days so that we bring out the best of our middos. But Torah is a lot more than that. It brings in an otherworldliness. It presents not only the laws that make us more moral people within the context of our world, rather it also opens up to us another world of spirituality far beyond the human world. Thus, Torah was given on the fiftieth

day rather than the forty-ninth day.

It is an idea that is worthy of bearing in mind as we interact with the world around us. There is an awful lot of noise about how the Torah is meant to make us the most moral people possible. That is certainly true. But those people who trumpet the Torah's position on every aspect of current events need to remember that Torah is far more than that. Much of the Torah cannot be explained - and should not be explained - in terms of this-worldliness. It is an aberration, truncating the higher part of Torah.

Torah is given on the fiftieth day. It requires forty-nine days of genuine preparation making ourselves better people with our efforts and in the context of this world. But then there is a fiftieth day. It is a gateway to a world beyond.

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from: **Alan Fisher** <afisherads@yahoo.com>

date: May 7, 2026, 9:56 PM

subject: **Potomac Torah Study** Center Dvar Torah

As I write in the late afternoon on Thursday, 20 Iyar, it is the 3337th anniversary of the day when our ancestors left the base of Har Sinai to resume their journey to the land that God had promised to our ancestors. This day always comes two weeks before the end of Sefira, and thus a bit more than two weeks before Shavuot.

The period between Pesach (the start of our freedom as a nation) and the Revelation (the day that became Shavuot) was supposed to be a joyous period for Jews. Pesach celebrates the Exodus, the beginning of our freedom as a people, and the Revelation celebrates our receiving the Torah, thus becoming truly free to dedicate our lives to Hashem's mitzvot.

This period, however, has become a season of mourning. During the first 32 days of Sefira, 12,000 pairs of Rabbinic students of Rabbi Akiva died of a plague, thought to be diphtheria (Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander). Our sages claim that these scholars, the brightest students of their time, died because they did not treat each other with proper respect.

(The plague ended on the 33rd day, Lag B'Omer.) During the Crusades, non-Jews in Europe burned many holy Jewish books and murdered countless Jews throughout Europe, especially during this period of early spring. During the Holocaust, the Warsaw uprising and Nazi murders of the people locked in the ghetto took place starting at the beginning of Pesach – and therefore continued for weeks during Sefira. During this period, we refrain from having weddings, shaving, taking haircuts, and attending live music for a period of 33 days. (Most commonly until Lag B'omer, a day when rejoicing is permitted. Some have a tradition of also permitting exceptions on Rosh Hodesh Iyar, and even those who observe Sefira during the last 33 days permit exceptions starting with Rosh Hodesh Sivan.)

The depressing events continue during Sefira during our times. One year ago on the evening of 24 Iyar, a thug shot and murdered Yaron Lischinsky and Sarah Milgrim, two Israeli Embassy staff members (recently engaged to be married), in front of the Washington, DC Capital Jewish Museum. During the past five weeks of Sefira, Iran and Hezbollah have been sending many thousands of weapons into Israel, and anti-Semites have been attacking Jews violently in many parts of the world. While some governments have tried to protect Jews, many universities even in the United States have permitted violent demonstrations, and police in some countries (such as the United Kingdom) have not done anything to prevent violence against Jews and their property. Even in 2026, the period of Sefira remains a period of mourning.

Rabbi Brander reminds us that we should react as Jews and remain Kadosh even as we respond to attacks. Rabbi Brander notes too many incidents of Jews oppressing non-Jews in Israel, especially in disputed areas (Old City of Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria). As he states, immoral conduct can undo even the most elevated spiritual aspirations – one of the lessons of Rabbi Akiva's students. Rabbi Sacks gives a similar message. Remarking why the Tochacha is so much longer than the blessings, he reminds us that God

forgives our sins – but only if we acknowledge our sins, express remorse, make restitution, and repent. God does not forgive sinners who do not repent, because rewarding sinners would encourage more sin and make the world a worse place.

Rabbi Gurkow's lesson from Entebbe fits perfectly. He quotes the Rebbe: "A Jew is never alone – a Jew is always with G-d." Shabbat Shalom,

from: **Michal Horowitz** <michalchorowitz@gmail.com>

date: May 7, 2026, 8:04 AM

subject: **When the Tongue is Good**

With the reading of Parshas Behar, the Torah presents a number of mitzvos that govern economic life, interpersonal responsibility, and sensitivity toward others. Among these is a pasuk that, at first glance, appears in the context of financial dealings, yet Chazal reveal its far deeper and broader implication.

The Torah teaches: וְלֹא תוֹנֵג אִישׁ אֶת-עֵמִיתוֹ וְנִרְאֶתָהּ מְאֹלָקִיךָ כִּי אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם - You shall not wrong one another, and you shall fear your G-d, for I am Hashem your G-d (Vayikra 25:17).

Rashi, citing Chazal, explains that this pasuk is not referring to monetary oppression - which has already been addressed earlier - but rather to ona'as devarim, causing pain to another through words. The Torah warns us not to hurt another person through speech - not to embarrass, not to insult, and not to speak in a way that causes emotional pain.

The concluding words of the pasuk are striking: "וְנִרְאֶתָהּ מְאֹלָקִיךָ" - and you shall fear your G-d." Rashi explains that this phrase appears specifically in situations that are given over to the heart - matters that cannot always be detected or judged by others. Words can be subtle. A comment can be framed in a way that appears harmless, yet carries an undertone of hurt or humiliation. Only the speaker knows the true intent. Therefore, the Torah reminds us that even when no one else can see or measure the impact of our words, Hashem knows.

Chazal further illuminate the power of speech through a striking teaching in the Medrash (Vayikra Rabbah 33:1). Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel instructed his servant Tavi to go to the marketplace and purchase the best food. Tavi returned with a tongue. He then instructed him to bring the worst food, and once again, Tavi returned with a tongue.

Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel questioned this: when I asked for the best, you brought a tongue, and when I asked for the worst, you also brought a tongue. Tavi replied: מִיָּנָה טְבָתָא וּמִיָּנָה בִישְׁתָּא, כְּדִן הָיָה טַב לִית טְבָה מְנִיָּה, וְכֵן בִישׁ לִית בִישׁ מְנִיָּה - From it (the tongue) comes good, and from it comes bad. When it is good, there is nothing better than it, and when it is bad, there is nothing worse than it.

The Medrash reinforces this idea with the words of Mishlei: מָוֶת וְחַיִּים בְּיַד לְשׁוֹן - Death and life are in the hands of the tongue (Mishlei 18:21). This teaching is both simple and profound. The same faculty - speech - has the capacity to build or to destroy, to heal or to harm, to give life or to, chalilah, cause deep pain.

The prohibition of ona'as devarim is therefore not limited to overtly harsh or abusive language. It includes any form of speech that diminishes another person - a sarcastic comment, a dismissive remark, a reminder of past failures, or words spoken without sensitivity to another's situation.

At the same time, the very same tongue that has the capacity for harm also carries the potential for immense good. A kind word can uplift another person. A word of encouragement can restore confidence. A thoughtful comment can strengthen a relationship. Words of Torah anchor us, giving depth and meaning to our everyday lives.

The Medrash is teaching us that speech itself is neutral - its impact depends entirely on how we choose to use it. This places a profound responsibility upon us.

In our daily interactions, we speak constantly - with family, with friends, with colleagues, and even with strangers. Often, words are spoken quickly, without reflection. Yet the Torah is reminding us that every word carries weight.

Do our words build or do they break? Do they create connection or distance?

Do they reflect sensitivity and awareness, or do they cause unintended hurt? The mitzvah of וְלֹא תוֹנוּ אִישׁ אֶת עֵמִיתוֹ calls upon us to become more mindful of our speech - not only in avoiding harm, but in actively choosing words that uplift and strengthen.

And perhaps this is why the Torah concludes with "וְיָרֵאתָ מֵאֱלֹהֶיךָ." Proper speech is not only a matter of interpersonal conduct; it is an expression of yiras Shamayim. It reflects an awareness that our words matter, that they are heard not only by those around us, but are known before Hashem.

When we internalize this, our speech begins to change. We pause before speaking. We consider the impact of our words. We choose to use our speech as a tool for good - for kindness, for encouragement, and for connection.

At times, we may underestimate the impact of a single comment or passing remark. We assume that words are fleeting, that once spoken they disappear. But the Torah teaches otherwise. Words linger. They take root in the heart of the listener, sometimes strengthening and sometimes wounding. A moment of carelessness in speech can leave a lasting impression, while a moment of sensitivity can uplift far beyond what we imagine.

Recognizing this gives new weight to even our simplest interactions.

May we merit to guard our words carefully, to avoid causing pain to others through speech, and to harness the power of the tongue for good.

And in this merit, may our words be a source of life - bringing bracha, connection, and kedusha into our lives and the lives of those around us.

ברכת בשורות טובות ושבת שלום,

<http://yated.com/revisiting-the-cave-and-the-joy-of-lag-ba-omer>

Revisiting the Cave and the Joy of Lag Ba'omer

By Rav Yaakov Feitman

It is well known that the incredible saga of Rav Shimon Bar Yochai and his son, Rav Eliezer, writing the holy Zohar in the cave may be found in Masseches Shabbos 33b.

The Aruch Hashulchan (Orach Chaim 493:7) noted that Rav Shimon and his son left the cave on the 33rd day of the Omer and that Rav Shimon also passed away on this day in later years. Indeed, the significance of the number continues with the revelation that the narrative of the cave is the 33rd mention of Rav Shimon in Shas (Rav Shalom of Kaminka, talmid muvhak of the Sar Sholom of Belz).

Over the centuries, many esoteric aspects of this sojourn of the father and son have emerged. Some are beyond this writer and this article. However, some of these revelations and explications offer us practical suggestions for improving our own avodas Hashem and various aspects of our spiritual lives. In honor of the upcoming kedusha of this special day, let's explore some of these to the extent that we are capable and permitted to do so.

That Gemara in Shabbos tells us that Rav Shimon and Rav Eliezer only put on their clothing during their entire occupation of the cave for twelve full years in order to daven. The rest of the time, they "sat covered in sand up to their necks."

The question is why they did such a strange thing. The Shelah Hakadosh teaches that they were in effect burying themselves. Again, to what end? One answer is actually almost obvious. The Gemara (Brachos 63b) asks: "How do we know that the Torah is not sustained in a person unless he kills himself over it? [It may be derived] from the posuk, 'This is the Torah [of] a person who dies in a tent.'"

The Maharal (Netzach Yisroel, Chapter 7) explains that the corporeality of the body and the spirituality of the soul are two opposites. He therefore raises the major issue: "How, then, can the Torah, which is pure intellect, reside in the body, which is totally materialistic?" Therefore, a person must (figuratively, not literally) eliminate his physical self so that the Torah within him can survive."

Of course, we must be extremely careful here. Not only does the Torah forbid suicide, but one of the main mandates of the Torah (last week's parsha, Acharei Mos) is "You shall live by them" (Vayikra 18:5), to which Chazal (Yoma 85b) add, "But not die by them."

The Gemara elsewhere (Tamid 32a) records that one of the questions

Alexander the Great put to the Elders of the South was: "What should a person do in order to live?" Their cryptic answer was: "He should kill himself." What can all this possibly mean coming from our lifeaffirming Torah?

The Imrei Emes of Gur (Likkutim, Masseches Tamid, page 90) explained that the term yamus es atzmo, which is mistranslated literally as "should kill himself," actually means "should kill his 'self,'" meaning his ego and self-centeredness. The Shelah also references the verse in Koheles (7:29), which states that "Hashem originally made man perfectly straight." In other words, we are inherently perfect but tend to ruin the perfection that the Creator granted us. Thus, when Rav Shimon and Rav Eliezer buried themselves inside the cave, they were actually renouncing any shred of self that they still possessed. Slowly and painfully, as the Gemara there describes, they had eliminated any personal needs, wants or desires, and lived perfectly in a state of wanting solely to do the will of Hashem.

from: TorahAnytime <info@torahanytime.com>

date: May 7, 2026, 10:19 PM

subject: Your TorahAnyTimes Parashat Behar Bechukotai is here

Rabbi Shlomo Landau

Peace Between Us

One of the greatest gifts of being a Jew is the opportunity to live with the weekly Parsha. Every single week, the Torah somehow speaks directly to the moment we are living in; sometimes personally, sometimes nationally, and often both at once. A Pasuk written thousands of years ago suddenly feels like it was written this morning.

In this week's Parsha, there is a message that feels especially timely and painfully relevant.

Parshas Bechukosai opens:

"Im bechukosai teilechu—If you walk in My statutes." If the Jewish people live according to Torah, if Torah becomes not merely something they observe occasionally but the very rhythm and foundation of their lives, then Hashem promises extraordinary blessings.

Among them: "You will dwell securely in your land."

Imagine those words.

Safety. Security. Peace of mind. No fear of enemies. No anxiety about missiles, terror, Hezbollah, Iran, or the endless threats surrounding the State of Israel. No fear of world opinion, political hostility, international hypocrisy, or the instability of nations. The Ribbono Shel Olam Himself—the only One who can truly guarantee security—promises protection.

But then the Torah adds another blessing:

"And I will place peace in the land" (Vayikra 26:6) At first glance, the Pasuk sounds repetitive. Didn't the Torah already promise security with "And you shall securely in your land" (ibid. 26:5)? What additional blessing is being given here?

The answer is profound. The first blessing refers to peace from without. The second blessing refers to peace from within.

The Torah is teaching us that it is possible for a nation to survive external enemies and still be internally fractured. A people can possess military strength, intelligence capabilities, alliances, and defense systems, yet still be torn apart from the inside by hatred, division, suspicion, and ideological warfare.

Therefore the Torah gives a second, deeper beracha: "And I will place peace in the land." That Jews should live in peace with one another. That there should not be endless camps and factions tearing each other apart. Not religious against secular. Not left against right. Not Ashkenazi against Sephardi. Not one camp delegitimizing another camp. The greatest blessing is not merely that our enemies fail to destroy us. It is that we stop destroying each other. Throughout Jewish history, external enemies have wounded us. But internal division has devastated us.

And perhaps that is why the second blessing is greater than the first. A nation united internally becomes nearly indestructible externally. So as we read this

week's Parsha, we should certainly daven for protection from those who seek to harm the Jewish people. We should pray for the safety of soldiers, civilians, and all of Klal Yisroel.

But perhaps even more urgently, we should pray for the fulfillment of the second promise: "And I will place peace in the land." That Hashem should bring peace not only around us, but between us.

from: **Rabbi Efreim Goldberg** <reg@rabbierefreimgoldberg.com>

date: May 6, 2026, 4:02 PM

subject: **The Ultimate Sleep Aid**

You may know the feeling: you climb into bed exhausted, convinced you'll be out in minutes, and then suddenly it's an hour later and you're still staring at the ceiling. You flip your pillow, shift positions, check the clock (and instantly regret it), and try to quiet a mind that only seems to grow louder as the night deepens.

For millions of people, this isn't occasional, it's routine. About one in three adults report struggling with sleep, whether it's lying awake long after lights out or jolting awake at 3 a.m., body tired but mind wide open. In those moments, it's tempting to reach for something, sleeping pills, melatonin, a late-night scroll, even a l'chaim, anything that might take the edge off and finally bring sleep.

But for many, these fixes don't work, don't last, or don't make sense long term. Pills can leave you foggy or simply aren't healthy to rely on. Scrolling keeps your brain switched on. And the harder you try to force sleep, the more it slips out of reach. Night after night, for so many, it becomes a familiar cycle: exhaustion, effort, and a frustrating kind of wakefulness that feels impossible to escape.

Recently, in our Living with Emunah shiur, we explored a sleep strategy, one that doesn't cost money, doesn't require a prescription, and not only has no negative long-term effects but may actually carry positive ones.

In his sefer Shaarei Tefillah, Rav Dovid Avuchatzera points to a sentence from Tehillim that we repeat three times as part of Krias Shema al Ha'Mita, the nighttime Shema:

הַגִּבּוֹר לֹא יִישָׁן וְלֹא יִשְׁכָּח יִשְׂרָאֵל "See, the Guardian of Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps."

Rav Dovid suggests that Chazal chose this pasuk, and encouraged us to repeat it specifically at night, because it can serve as a profound sleep aid. Just before we close our eyes, Hashem is, in a sense, telling us: "My child, I am your Guardian. I am watching over you, not only now, throughout the night, but always. Whatever you are worried about, whatever is keeping you up, whatever is making your mind race, I am watching over you. Whatever is weighing on you is in My hands. So, My child, close your eyes and sleep well, because I will be up. I neither slumber nor sleep. I am always guarding you. I stay awake so that you can sleep. Now let it go. Cast your burdens onto Me. Allow yourself to fall into a deep sleep, knowing that I remain awake, tending to whatever is on your mind."

When I first learned this, I found the idea deeply powerful, but I wondered whether it was practical. Could something so simple truly make a difference? Then I received this email: "Hi Rabbi Goldberg, I hope all is well. I recently started listening to your shiurim and wanted to share something. For over a year, I struggled significantly with sleep. I'm a young woman in my 20s, and sleep had never been an issue for me before. On the contrary, I used to fall asleep easily anywhere when I was tired. But over the past year, that completely changed. I would either take hours to fall asleep or wake up multiple times throughout the night, and I would wake up exhausted in the morning. I tried many different things, setting a consistent sleep schedule, exercise, melatonin, magnesium, and more. Some of it helped briefly, but the issue always returned. About two weeks ago, it had gotten particularly bad. I was extremely tired and desperately wanted to sleep, but the moment I lay down, my mind became fully alert and I simply couldn't fall asleep. I'm not generally an anxious person, so I was confused and frustrated by what was happening. That week, I was out with a friend and it was getting late. She suggested I go home since I had work the next day. I told her I actually

needed to stay out longer so I could become very tired, hoping I might finally sleep better. Shortly after, I drove home and put on one of your shiurim (Living with Emunah, episode #382). I had debated whether to play acapella music or listen to a shiur—I'm so glad I chose the shiur. In the shiur, you said: "There are people who lie awake in bed all night and can't fall asleep." I was instantly taken aback—I had just been speaking about this struggle with friends and family. You then explained the words from Krias Shema al Ha'Mita: "Hinei lo yanum ve'lo yishan Shomer Yisrael." It's as if Hashem is telling us: I neither slumber nor sleep. Shomer Yisrael. You can go to sleep, because I am staying awake. I am guarding you. I am watching over you. Sleep comfortably. Sleep well. Whatever is keeping you up—just sleep. Don't worry. I am guarding you. As you repeated these words, I actually had to pull over and just listen in disbelief. It felt as though Hashem was speaking directly to me through your shiur. I was in complete awe. That night, I slept better than I had in over a year. I did not wake up even once. Since then, my sleep has continued to improve significantly, and I hope it continues. I immediately sent this part of the shiur to my friends and shared it with coworkers I had been complaining to. We were all blown away by the hashgacha, how perfectly tailored that message felt for me. I wanted to share and thank you, Rabbi Goldberg, for being the shaliach.

It wasn't the only message. Another email described that after the shiur, and after focusing on this thought before going to sleep, "I slept so much better than usual for the first time in well over a year." Others have shared that this simple meditation, the image of Hashem saying, "Close your eyes because I keep Mine open. Sleep and rest well because I stay up and watch over you," has made a profound difference in their nights.

I can't guarantee this will work for everyone. Someone who needs other aids or forms of help should never feel guilty or ashamed for seeking them. But if you've tried everything, and even if you haven't, consider embracing this pre-sleep practice. You may discover what you've been chasing all along: a mind that can finally let go, a soul that feels held, and a night of real, restful sleep.

Parshas Behar: Sh'Mittah And Sinai

By Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

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

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

II. RASHI'S ANSWER

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

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

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

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

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

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

Further on in the Parashah, the Torah delineates a series of Mitzvot affecting social welfare – beginning with support for fellows who are suffering, helping them redeem their land etc. Why are these Mitzvot in our Parashah – shouldn't they be in Parashat Mishpatim (Sh'mot 21-23) with the rest of civil and criminal laws?

Finally, our Parashah ends with a verse which shows up elsewhere in Torah (Vayyikra 19:30): “Observe My Shabbatot and revere My Sanctuary, I am YHVH”. What is the meaning behind this twofold command?

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

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

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

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

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

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

IV. TWO KINDS OF SANCTITY

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

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

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

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

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

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Parshat Behar: Mitzvot of Shev'it and Yovel by Rabbi Eitan Mayer

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

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

A LOOK AT THE TEXTUAL LANDSCAPE:

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

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

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

- 18: arayot (sexual crimes such as incest, male homosexual sex, bestiality)
- 19: potpourri: interpersonal laws, ritual laws, agricultural laws, etc.
- 20: arayot etc.
- 23: mo'adim (holidays and holy days, e.g., Pesah, Shavuot, Succot, Rosh HaShana, Yom Kippur)
- 24: the mekallel (the blasphemous; "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-kadishkem] 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-kadishkem].

20:26 -- You shall be HOLY [kedoshim] to Me, for I, Y-HVH, am HOLY [kadosh]; 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 [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-kadishkem], am HOLY [kadosh].

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

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

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

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

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

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

Theme I: Korbanot (perakim 1-10)

Theme II: Tahara and Tum'a (perakim 11-16)

Theme III: Kedusha (perakim 17-27)

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

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

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

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

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

MY PET THEORY ABOUT KEDUSHA (AGAIN):

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

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

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

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

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

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

- 1) The Torah commands us to *be* "kedoshim": we are to be the "am kadosh" (dedicated nation); we are commanded "kedoshim tiyu" ("You shall be dedicated"). According to this understanding of kedusha, we are not commanded to be "holy," a command we wouldn't really understand; we are instead commanded to be "dedicated." Of course, this "dedication" is not itself the goal; the *object* of the dedication -- the mitzvot -- are the goals. Kedusha is a way of getting there: if we are "kedoshim," we are "dedicated" to the mitzvot.
- 2) The Torah commands us to dedicate ("me-kadesh") things other than ourselves: times, places, objects, and people, for example. Shabbat and the moa'dim are "dedicated" (kadosh) times; the Mishkan and Bet HaMikdash are "dedicated" (kadosh) spaces; the korbanot and the utensils of the Mishkan are "dedicated" (kadosh) objects; the Kohanim and others are specially "dedicated" (kadosh) people. The process of dedicating these things is not a secret ritual, it is apparent from the meaning of the word "dedicate": these things are to be set apart and restricted for higher purposes.

KEDUSHA AND RESTRICTION:

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

- 1) The kedusha of time always triggers a prohibition to do work ("mikra'ei kodesh" is not just followed by, but is explained by, "kol melakha/melekheth-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 Kodosh ha-Kodashim) because, by definition, dedicated space is restricted to a particular use;
- 3) The kedusha of objects is always connected to their restricted use (e.g., objects dedicated to the estate of the Mishkan--"hekdesh"--may not be used for personal benefit; korbanot may be eaten only by certain people for certain amounts of time and in certain places) because they are dedicated to a higher purpose;
- 4) The kedusha of people is always connected to restrictions about what they may have access to and who may have access to them (e.g., a Kohen is prohibited from contacting a corpse, marrying women with certain personal statuses; the Kohen Gadol, who is even more dedicated (kadosh), may not even contact the corpses of immediate family members and may not marry even a widow) because they are dedicated to higher purposes.

The connection between restrictions and kedusha is quite direct:

Kedusha = Dedication --> Restricted Access.

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

HILLUL:

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

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

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

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

THE KEDUSHA OF YOVEL AND SHEMITA:

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

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

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

In other words, Shemita and Yovel bring us:

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

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

These "achievements" fall into the class of human-focused concerns: taking care of the powerless (poor, slaves, etc.) and constructing a fair and stable economy (land 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 that man should remember that the land, which produces fruits for him every single year, does not do so on the basis of its own strength and qualities, but instead that it has a Master over it and over its [human] owners, and when He desires, He commands that it [the produce] be declared ownerless

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2) If Hashem is a truly merciful God, can it be that He will really punish us in the horrible ways depicted in the tokhaha? If so, how does that impact our understanding of Hashem's nature? [Another issue of philosophy; not our focus in a parasha shiur.]

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

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

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

A LOOK AT THE BOOKENDS:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

of these mitzvot in particular.

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

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

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

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

MEETING THE CHALLENGE:

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

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

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

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

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

HINTS FROM THE RAMBAM:

The Rambam's Hilkhot Shemita ve-Yovel (Laws of Shemita and Yovel) provides subtle but crucial confirmation that Shemita and Yovel are mitzvot that we accepted as a nation somewhat reluctantly. Instead of warnings and exhortations, these indications are assumptions which are built into the halakhic system:

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

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

[See also 4:27, 8:18]

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

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

TWO SIDES OF A COIN:

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

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

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

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

That this is one of the deeper meanings of the tokhaha is hinted by the Torah and by the Rambam's interpretation of it.

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

Rambam, Laws of Fast Days, Chapter 1:

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

...

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

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

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

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

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

Shabbat Shalom

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, Seforno is not very precise concerning exactly which mitzvot are summarized by this pasuk.

In our shiur, we will follow Seforno'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 chiasitic 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 Shabbat 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 chiasitic 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-ithalachtu betochachem, ve-hayiti lahem l-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 a 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) we 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)
	I. TOROT of: [first section]
6->7	- how to bring korbanot
8->10	- how the milu'im were offered
11->15	- yoledet, metzora, zav, zava
16->17	- how to enter kodesh kodashim
	II. CHUKIM U-MISHPATIM [second section]
18->20	- kedushat ha- am
21->22	- kedushat kohanim
23->25	- kedushat zman u-makom
26	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 'hekdesh'. 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 mizbeiach (kodshei mizbeiach) 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 chiasmic 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 Bechukotai (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 show 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 "I'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 ("tzedeq 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)

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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 chiasmic 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 chiasmic 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 chiasmic structure. [If you've never heard of chiasmic 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].

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 - **eret 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 to 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 'eret 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'forno 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'forno, 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'forno 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'forno 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’forno 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’forno 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’forno 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 translated as “clear out”, as above; or as “export”, as S’forno 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 them, 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’forno) 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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