BS"D
May 15, 2020
Friday is the 36th Day of the Omer

Potomac Torah Study Center
Vol. 7 #29, May 15, 2020; Behar - Bechukotai 5780

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 almost 50 years ago and was our family Rebbe and close friend until his recent untimely death.

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

Lisa Rosen and Sherri Alpert lovingly dedicate the Devrei Torah this Shabbas in honor of the 42nd Yahrzeit of their father, Nathan Alpert, z"l, 22 Iyar.

All of Sefer Vayikra takes place at the base of Har Sinai, where B'Nai Yisrael remained from before receiving the Aseret Dibrot until 20 Iyar of the second year, when they finally began their journey (Bamidbar 10:11). (Thursday of this week – yesterday as I start writing – was 20 Iyar and thus the anniversary of this departure.) A key theme of Sefer Vayikra is learning how to live in proximity to God, because the people were living next to the Mishkan. God's message to Moshe had been to have the people build a Mishkan, and God would reside among them (among the people). Proximity to God required special attention to kedusha, in speech, food, body, time (Shabbat, Moedim, shmittah, and yovel), and space (Mishkan and land of Israel).

The Torah includes a concept of building fences around the mitzvot. For example, we light candles 18 minutes before Shabbat begins to avoid coming so close to the deadline that we might light the candles too late. Similarly, God set fences around His special places – the people were to stay away from any part of Har Sinai during the Revelation, and to stay away from the central parts of the Mishkan.

Once B'Nai Yisrael learned to live in close proximity to God's presence, the next step was learning to extend these lessons to life away from the Mishkan and during times other than Shabbat and the other holy days. Once entering Israel, the people were to spread out and inhabit the land, only coming back to a central location on designated days (primarily the Sukkot, Pesach, and Shavuot).

Of all the mitzvot, Behar - Bechukotai especially emphasizes shmittah and yovel, the requirements to permit the land to observe Shabbat every seven years and an extra rest after every seven times seven years (yovel on the 50th year). During a shmittah year, the land was to lie fallow, and any crops that grew on their own were to be hefker, or ownerless (available to anyone who wished to harvest them), and debts from Jews to other Jews were to be canceled. On yovel, ownership of all land in Israel was to revert back to the original owners (from the division when the tribes entered the land, under the leadership of Yehoshua), and all slaves were to go free.

The most vivid section of Bechukotai is the Tochachah (warnings, curses, or admonitions) (26:14 ff.) , thirty verses warning of doom and destruction if the people did not follow God's mitzvot in the land. The specific warning of doom leading to the land vomiting the people off the land of Israel was for disobeying the mitzvot of shmittah and yovel. If we Jews did not observe these mitzvot, the land would kick us out until the land had rested for all the shmittah and yovel years that we had failed to observe.

The counting we do leading each week leading to Shabbat parallels the seven year Shabbat of the land (Shmittah). The Omer counting we do for seven Shabbatot between Pesach and Shavuot parallels the seven times seven years we count to reach yovel. We complete Sefer Vayikra each year heading into Shavuot – except that we wait a week between the Tochachah and Shavuot to avoid going into Yom Tov with a curse. Shavuot completes the freedom we started when

leaving Egypt on Pesach. We count seven weeks, and the next day coincides with our complete freedom, the day we received the Torah at Har Sinai. The parallel in terms of living in God's land (Israel) is yovel, when we grant freedom to all slaves and return all land to those designated to reside there. (Since only God owns the land in Israel, I wrote in terms of those designated to reside on specific land – not owners, because God is the real owner.)
So often in our weekly Torah readings, concern for our brothers (fellow Jews) is a major theme. We must share the rewards of the land with our fellows, because doing so is part of the requirement for using God's land. All the gifts of our success come from God, and God wants the gifts to go to all of us. We must remember how God has blessed us, so we should walk with God and include Him in our lives (and speak to Him daily, through our davening). Much of the language of Bechukotai repeats words and themes from Gan Eden. As Rashi reminds us, we have an opportunity to come close to the Gan Eden experience if we observe God's mitzvot and walk with Him.

The focus on the land of Israel in Behar - Bechukotai always makes me feel close to my beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l. Rabbi Cahan would travel to Israel a few times a year and bring back Judaica to make available to congregants. Rabbi Cahan's parents and sister Naomi made alliyah many years ago. As early as 1978, when we first visited Israel together, Hannah and I visited with Rabbi Cahan's family. This February, we had a delightful visit with Naomi Katz, Rabbi Cahan's sister, still living in Jerusalem – in the same building with my cousins. The Cahan family lived their love of Israel and shared this love with all their friends. The love of Israel is central to being a Jew – and that is one reason why the Tochachah is so frightening.

Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Gedalya ben Sarah, Mordechai ben Chaya, Baruch Yitzhak ben Perl, David Leib HaKohen ben Sheina Reizel, Zev ben Sara Chaya, Uzi Yehuda ben Mirda Behla, HaRav Dovid Meir ben Chaya Tzippa; Eliav Yerachmiel ben Sara Dina, Amoz ben Tziviah, Reuven ben Masha, Moshe David ben Hannah, Meir ben Sara, Yitzhok Tzvi ben Yehudit Miriam, Yaakov Naphtali ben Michal Leah, Rivka Chaya bat Leah, Chaya Tova bat Narges, Zissel Bat Mazal, Chana Bracha bas Rochel Leah, Leah Fruma bat Musa Devorah, Hinda Behla bat Chaya Leah, Nechama bas Tikva Rachel, Miriam Chava bat Yachid, and Ruth bat Sarah, all of whom greatly need our prayers. Note: Beth Sholom has additional names, including coronavirus victims, on a Tehillim list.

Hannah & Alan

Drasha: Behar: Blind Faith

by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky © 1997

[Please remember Mordechai ben Chaya for a Mishebarach!]

The commandment of Shemitah is a test of our faith and an examination in our true belief in the Almighty's ability to sustain us. The Torah commands us that every seven years we must let the land of Israel lie fallow, with no harvesting or planting of crops. But Hashem promises us that if "you shall perform My decrees, and observe My ordinances and perform them, then you shall dwell securely on the land. The land will give its fruit and you will eat your fill; you will dwell securely upon it" (Leviticus 25:18-19). Rashi explains the blessing "even if you eat only a little, it will be blessed in your stomach," The little you eat will grow into a bounty of satiation. But after assuring us that our little will feel plentiful the Torah talks to the naysayers. The Torah talks about that group of people. "If you will say – What will we eat in the seventh year? — behold! We will not sow and not gather in our crops!" Hashem assures them as well. "I will ordain My blessing for you in the sixth year and it will yield a crop sufficient for the three-year period." (Ibid v.20-21)

The Kli Yakar and a host of other commentaries ask. Why should a Jew ask that troubling question? Didn't Hashem command his abundant blessing in the sixth year? Didn't the little bit of food leave them satisfied? Why do they have concern about the ensuing years?

My dear friend Rabbi Benyamin Brenig of Golders Green, London recently related this wonderful story to me: Reuvain and Shimon were two men, who lived on opposite ends of town. They each inherited a fortune of gold. Each of them decided to bury their fortunes in their backyards. They wanted to make sure that they would have something to sustain them in their old age. On their respective properties, they each picked a landmark, paced twenty steps due north and dug a large hole.

Reuvain, the more nervous of the two, was careful to make sure that no one was watching. Every other second he glanced furtively over his shoulder to make sure that no one saw him bury the treasure. No one did.

Shimon, by nature, was trusting and carefree and he was not so careful. He was not worried that anyone would steal his fortune. But he was wrong. He was spotted by a nosy neighbor, who was also a thief.

In the middle of the night, the thief dug up the fortune. Out of mercy, he left few coins at the bottom of the pit, and removed the coins. He refilled the hole and packed the ground perfectly as if nothing was disturbed. Then he took off with the fortune.

Reuvain's fortune, however, remained intact. But he was, by nature, a worrier. And so, the next day he decided to dig up the hole to make sure that the gold was still there. Accidentally, he counted only fifteen paces from his landmark and dug. There was nothing there. Reuvain was frantic. Someone must have seen him dig the pit, he figured. For the rest of his life, he worried. On his property, he had a pit filled with gold coins, but all Reuvain did was worry!

Shimon on the other hand had nothing but the remnants of a few coins. Everything else was stolen. But he never checked the fortune, and was merrily content, assured that when the time would come he could dig up the pit and retrieve his fortune. Reuvain, the millionaire, died heartbroken and frantic. Shimon, the man with but a few coins left for his old-age lived his life content as if he was the wealthiest man in the world.

The Torah tells us about the different types of blessings. For the faithful, Hashem says, "I will command my blessing in the sixth year," in which Rashi assures us that even a bit will feel like a bounty. But we must acknowledge that despite Heavenly assurances, there are those who always worry. They need to see the money! They ask, "What will we eat in the seventh year? Behold! We will not sow and not gather in our crops!" Hashem must assure them that he will increase their bounty in a way that is visible to them.

Some of us can believe without seeing immediate results. We can sleep well, with full satisfaction on empty stomachs. The greatest expression of faith is when we do not see the blessing, but we feel it in our hearts and even in our stomachs. That blessing transcends tangibility, and the fear of deficiency. I think that is a noble goal.

For the rest of us, those who keep looking over their shoulder and check their fortunes every day, they need a different type of blessing. Sometimes we dig for tangible salvation, even though the treasure is sitting undisturbed in our own backyard.

Good Shabbos!

Behar – A Society Based on Kedusha

by Rabbi Dov Linzer, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah © 2011, 2020

How can kedusha be created outside of the Temple? This is, in many ways, the concern of the second half of the book of Vayikra, and is in particular the concern of parshat Behar. The goal of the Mikdash was not for God to "dwell" in the Temple, but for God to dwell among us: v'asu li mikdash, vi'shakhanti bi'tokham, "You shall make for me a Temple and I will dwell in their – the people's – midst." (Shemot 25:8). So while the first half of Vayikra focuses on the rites of the Temple and how to maintain and protect its sanctity, the second half of Vayikra is devoted to how to bring that sanctity out into the camp, into the midst of the people.

The Torah lays out this goal in the opening of parshat Kedoshim, declaring that it is the responsibility of each individual to strive for kedusha, for holiness. "Holy shall you be, because holy am I, the Lord your God who makes you holy" (Vayikra 19:2). The goal of becoming holy, of not circumscribing holiness to the Temple and the Kohanim, is mandated for each individual. This is step one. But this still falls short. Holiness cannot just be the responsibility of each individual. It must also be the responsibility of the society at large. If the society at large is devoted to achieving this goal, then not only will individuals be supported because their efforts are shared by others, but also the very institutions and structuring of society will reflect and reinforce these goals.

The Torah begins this structuring of the larger society with the moadim at the end of last week's parsha, Emor. The Children of Israel are commanded to declare the holidays, the holy days, in their proper time: "These are the fixed times of God that you shall proclaim as sacred occasions, mikraei kodesh, there are my fixed celebratory times." (Vayikra 23:2). The first step in structuring society around kedusha is to structure the calendar around these foci of kedusha. The basic rhythms of daily life are then synchronized with, and in reference to, the holy days. That is why Shabbat is included in the list of moadim, although it is not dependent on the way the calendar is set up, is not a holy day that "you shall proclaim." While independent of the seasonal calendar, the foundation of Shabbat is the central component to our bringing kedusha into our week and our structure of time. "From the first of the week, we must already begin to prepare for Shabbat" (Beitzah 16a).

To this foundation are added the seasonal festivals, bringing kedusha into the natural seasons of the year, and orienting all agricultural labors – the primary engagement of the people – towards God and God's holidays. What is particularly noteworthy about the

description of the moadim in Emor is that the Torah emphasizes their observance outside the Temple, and not the sacrifices that are brought for them in the Temple (this is the emphasis of the description in parshat Pinchas). The point is obvious – while these holidays are commemorated in the Temple, your responsibility is to draw on the Temple experience but bring these holy days into the camp, into the very fabric of society. Sometimes this will pull you back into the Temple – when you (collectively) bring the first of the barley or grain harvest to the Temple. And when, at the end of the year, you gather in all of your produce, you will celebrate God's bounty in the camp – taking the lulav and esrog, and sitting in the sukkah for seven days, rejoicing before God.

Because all of our labor exists within the larger context of kedusha and of recognizing God's gift to us, we will naturally share our bounty – God's bounty – with those who are less fortunate than we: "And when you harvest the harvesting of your land, you shall not reap the corners of the field, and you shall not gather the gleanings of your harvest. To the poor and the stranger you shall leave them, I am the Lord your God." (Vayikra 23:22). Kedusha, then, brings a God-consciousness to our activities, and this awareness finds its expression both in our relationship to God – giving of thanks and praying for the future – and in our relationship to our fellow human being.

Parshat Behar is the culmination and apex of what it means to structure a society around kedusha. The deeply-held institutions of contemporary society – free exercise of one's property, private ownership in perpetuity, free-range capitalism, the ability to charge interest on a loan, the leaving of "charity" to personal choice – all of these are profoundly challenged in parshat Behar, in a society where God is at the center. The key paradigm shift that the Torah is telling us that we must make is that the world and everything in it does not ultimately belong to us, it belongs to God: "And the land you shall not sell in perpetuity, for Mine is the land, and you are dwellers and residents with Me (in My land)" (Vayikra 25:23).

Once we are able to make this paradigm shift, to have God at the center, then the remainder of the parsha follows. If we do not own the land, but are given use of it by God, then we must always ask what is the proper and accepted use. We will need to periodically stop using the land to remind ourselves that it is not truly ours – so we will have a Sabbatical year, a "Sabbath of the land," but more significantly, "a Sabbath to God." (25:2). We will not only stop working the land, but we also will allow all to eat from its produce, in effect relinquishing our very ownership, and thereby acknowledging that such ownership is really an illusion. And on the Sabbath of Sabbaths of the Jubilee year, we will not only suspend our ownership, but truly reverse it, restoring the land to its original owners and the people to their freedom.

The deep structuring of society by the principles of the Sabbatical year will reorient our relationship to property in other realms as well. Thus, when it comes to lending money, we will understand that money, like the land, is given to us by God, and that we must use it not as we see fit, but in ways that are proper. We will have an obligation to lend to the poor, and to do so without charging interest (25:35-38). Once the concept of complete ownership has been challenged, we will understand that even when we purchase a slave – an inescapable reality in ancient times – such a "purchase" can never mean true ownership, for if we cannot own land, how much less so can we own another human being. And, finally, we will acknowledge our responsibility to use our own funds to help restore the original owners to their inheritance, because our goal will be not to maximize our profit, but to make our residence on the land according to God's will, and to use our wealth that God has given us, in ways that help us serve God maximally.

The Torah's focus throughout is that of laying the foundation of kedusha. The societally beneficial practices are what naturally follow, but they are not the starting point. It is for this reason that the Torah does not refer to the Sabbatical year in this parsha as Shmitta. That is the word used in Shemot (23:11) and Devarim (15:1-3), whose meaning is "to let go." The focus there is the societal benefit per se, it is the giving of the produce of the land to the poor and the releasing of debts. In Behar such benefits are a mere consequence of the deeper reality of the Shabbat of the years. Once the concept of Shabbat is introduced not only into the calendar of days, but also into the calendar of years, once the concept of Shabbat is introduced into the deep structure of society, the entire orientation towards property, land, and ownership will shift. Once kedusha is taken out of the Temple and brought into the camp, once kedusha becomes the framing concept of our lives, then our society will be transformed, our entire lives will be transformed.

It is necessary not to lose sight of the importance of the foundation of kedusha, even at times when the practical implementations are beyond our reach. It may not be feasible at all times to fully follow the demands of the Sabbatical Year. Already in the early Talmudic period, Hillel developed the pruzbol as a workaround to allow people, who otherwise would never have loaned to the poor, to collect their loans even after the Sabbatical year had transpired. And the Rabbis, perhaps implicitly understanding that the Torah's call for not loaning with interest was less feasible, and less meaningful, in a commercial context, developed the workaround known as a heter iska, turning a commercial loan into an investment. And in modern times, Rav Kook developed the heter mechira, the selling of the entire Land of Israel to a non-Jew, as a device to allow the land to be worked, and real societal needs to be addressed, during the Shmita year.

Once we have all these workarounds, it is easy to lose sight of the principle of kedusha. We may easily come to see these laws as burdens, to see the goal as to how to avoid them, and to maintain our non--kedusha orientation towards money, property, and land. Rav Kook was very sensitive to this concern. He stated explicitly in his introduction to his work on the heter mechira, VeShavta Ha'aretz, that he insisted on affirming the kedusha of the land, and using the sale as a technical solution, and rejected those who would solve the practical problems by denying the kedusha of the land. This, said Rav Kook, would make us lose sight of the core value of kedusha and kedushat ha'aretz. A practical solution may be needed at times but we cannot allow ourselves to lose sight of the principle.

Our challenge today remains how to both address practical realities, and at the same time work to structure our society around the principles of kedusha. If we focus our efforts on this reorientation, on bringing kedusha into the camp, then we can strive to one day actually living in a society which is defined by kedusha, not just in principle, but in practice.

Shabbat Shalom!

Behar – Bechukotai -- Wanted: Dead & Alive!

by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine ©2020 Teach 613

"If you will go in My laws, and observe My commandments…" So begins the description of Hashem's blessings that we will receive if we will conduct ourselves in the ways of Torah. But, the statement seems redundant. What does it mean to "go" in the laws that is not included in "observing"?

The Maharal explains that "going" refers to growth as opposed to stagnation. To "go" in Torah means to go deeper, to progress in one's understanding and in one's depth of observance.

Many people think that such growth is only for Torah scholars. Torah scholars constantly strive to achieve new levels of greatness in Torah. But me? Yes! The truth is that this concept of "going" in Torah applies to all of us. We may not all be able to spend many hours learning Torah and delving into its message. But, we should each have a serenity hour: an hour which is set aside to fulfill this directive, "to go in Torah." If not every day, but certainly once a week, there should be a time designated to advance in Torah.

Sometimes, we really want to designate time to study and advance in Torah. It just seems that somehow life just seems to get in the way.

The story is told of a wealthy man who often invited poor people to his home for dinner. His generosity was such that the table was set beautifully, and he offered much food to his guests. But, he had one fault. He was very curious.

As soon as the poor guest would sit down, he would pepper the guest with questions about his family and hometown. Trying to be courteous, the poor person would invariably try to answer the questions politely. But, by the time he did so, the course was over, and the poor man didn't get to eat much.

No one was quite sure if the wealthy man was being mean, or was just insatiably curious. It made no matter. Invariably, his guests didn't get to eat.

One day, a guest arrived in town from the very town where the wealthy man had grown up. The locals warned the beggar to accept an invite from anyone in town except from this wealthy man. Should he be so unfortunate as to end up in this man's home, the beggar would surely never be able to eat, as he would have to fill the man in on all the details on the town of his youth. The beggar listened to the warning closely and then accepted the invitation to the wealthy man's house.

As they sat down to eat, the wealthy man asked where he was from. When he heard that the beggar was from the town of his youth, he began to ask questions. "So how is the butcher doing?" he asked. The beggar replied, "The butcher?! He's dead." The wealthy man was a bit shocked. He asked, "And what about the mayor?" Between mouthfuls, the beggar answered, "Oh, he's also dead." The wealthy man continued to inquire about the townspeople, but the response was always the same.

Finally, the wealthy man sensed that something was up. He asked, "Is there anyone left alive in the town?"

The beggar replied, "Actually, when I am eating, the whole world is dead."

Perhaps that attitude can work for us when we try to enjoy a few minutes of Torah growth and learning but life seems to get in the way. I knew a great businessman who used to tell his secretary to hold the calls while he devoted himself to half an hour of Torah study at midday. He said, "Make believe I'm dead. Everyone should be able to manage without me for a half hour."

Torah study is the key to Torah growth. And, the rewards for "going" in Torah are the blessings of the Parsha. Sometimes it pays to play dead for a few minutes. The reward for playing dead, is a much more meaningful and blessed life.

With best wishes for a wonderful Shabbos.

Parshas Behar-Bechukosai

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer

As we complete Sefer Vayikra our pact with G-d is repeated. We are told of the promise of success beyond dreams for proper fulfillment of Torah and the gruesome *Tochacha*/Rebuke should we fall away from Torah. The depiction of the blessings is as brief as the depiction of the rebuke is expansive. While we are aware of the basic tenet of Torah Judaism that all G-d does is for the best, it can be difficult to see the *Tochacha* in this light. It would seem to require a leap of faith, a leap that may even appear to be against our better judgement.

There is a subtle point in these verses which Rash"i highlights. The blessings are introduced with the clause "If you will walk in my statues", and the *Tochacha* is introduced with the clause "If you do not listen to me". The Medrash Toras Kohanim teaches that these clauses are referring to whether or not we toil in Torah study. The first step towards receiving the blessings and avoiding the *Tochacha* is the act of toiling in Torah study. Torah study is one mitzvah which is accessible to any individual at any time and any place. Our rabbis teach us that Torah study includes taking the time to review one's actions and ways and seeking ideas and methods to improve one's self. It is this most accessible mitzvah which G-d arranged to be the pivotal point for our success.

Rash"i tells us further that the clause preceding the *Tochacha* has an added word – לי – "to me". It would have sufficed to say "If you do not listen and do not keep my commandments". The extra word is teaching us that the *Tochacha* does not apply to anyone who falls away from Torah, but only those who choose not to listen to "*ME"* – only those who recognize and understand what G-d wants of them, and choose not to listen to G-d. In addition to making this easy, G-d has also set an extreme standard for receiving the *Tochacha*. There is no such clause for the blessings. Whether or not we properly recognize G-d, once we engage in Torah study we begin the process of earning the blessings. G-d is stacking the deck in our favor.

As we consider the mitzvah of Torah study, this becomes even more clear. Our rabbis teach us that every word of Torah is a mitzvah unto itself, and that mitzvah can be equivalent to keeping all 613 mitzvos of the Torah. When we consider the number of words we say each minute as we study, each minute can be the equivalent of thousands of mitzvos, and an hour of study can already be equivalent to millions of mitzvos. G-d has designed an accessible mitzvah, with inestimable value to be at the center of a Torah lifestyle.

We find this thought echoed in the Ramba"m's commentary on the Mishnayos (Makkos 3:17). He tells us that Hashem made the Torah with many details and opportunities so that over the course of one's lifetime it is guaranteed that anyone who is trying will do at least one mitzvah perfectly, out of pure devotion to G-d. The system is created for our success. Rash"i in Gemara Shabbos 105b illustrates this even further. The most secular Jew, bereft of a Torah lifestyle, has done enough Torah and mitzvos to contain the spiritual holiness of a Torah scroll. G-d is on our side and has stacked the deck in our favor.

From this perspective, we can begin to understand why our Rabbis felt compelled to understand how all the difficulties are ultimately for our benefit. We see clearly that G-d is on our side, and that He has built a world and a Torah balanced heavily in our favor. Indeed, the opening Medrash Rabbah on Bechukosai tells us that King David only came to the levels of love and awe of G-d which he achieved by studying the paths which lead to blessings and curses. Recognition of G-d's love for us was never intended to be a leap of faith.

This understanding is particularly significant for us today. To understand the lessons of the times we are living through, we must first look at all the blessings in our lives. Only when we understand that G-d loves us, can we begin to properly understand the lessons G-d wishes us to learn.

* Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD (and a close friend who has helped me with my Devrei Torah on numerous occasions in recent years).

Behar/Bechukotai: Teenage Parenthood

By Rabbi Moshe Rube
Knesseth Torah Congregation, Birmingham, AL*

Comedians are the new philosophers. The things they say are jokes and we should treat them as such but all the same, I find that many a comedy set causes me to look at an issue from a new perspective.

For instance, I never thought I would need to think about why I oppose teenagers having kids. It's just one of those topics that I've never been asked about.

And yet, this week I heard a bit from comedian Nate Bargatze that made me look at the issue. In the bit, Nate says that at 33 he became a father to a baby girl. He figures he has 20 years before she moves out of the house and he can be free to explore the world again. In that respect, he thinks that teenage parents have the right idea having kids so early as by their 30's they've had their kids and are free for the rest of their lives. Nate finishes by saying if he would have been a teenage parent, he would have been done by now. (Click https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2l-6mFvm8RM and watch the first 50 seconds to see the bit)

Again, this is comedy. The fact that this is so obviously absurd and wrong makes us laugh if we would hear this at a comedy show. But what also makes us laugh is that on some level we can relate to it. Especially as parents face struggles in this pandemic with having their kids at home 24/7. I'd wager a few of them are wondering what it would be like and how much easier it would be if their kids were already grown up and out of the house. Even if no parent would have taken the teenage option, that feeling of wanting to be free from responsibility if only for a short time makes this relatable enough to be funny.

So after I laughed, I thought about it. I'm 30 now. If I had kids in my teens, they'd have been almost grown up by now. Is there really something wrong with encouraging teens to have babies early?

Of course there's something wrong with that! I only asked the question because the answer I will give may bear a lot of relevance to other areas of our life (and this week's parsha).

So we all know that teenage parenthood is not an ideal situation. When we ask why, we immediately state the obvious that the financial and emotional fallout has dangers of severely hurting a teenager's chance to live a happy and healthy life. Of course, there are teens who have gone through it and made it but I doubt that even they would recommend anybody doing that.

But I think we can go deeper and find a fatal flaw within Nate Bargatze's logic. (I'm sure he'd agree with and even find it funny that I'm taking what he said so seriously.)

In Yiddish there's an expression called yoytze. It's an expression we use to tell others that we have fulfilled an obligation. "I was yoytze shaking lulav". "Are you yoytze kiddush with grape juice?" "He was yoytze social distancing by holding a 6ft tape measure in front of him at all times."

Now with all the mitzvos we have to do, we frequently think about if we're yoytze or not. But we only can use it to ask the question of whether we fulfilled our obligation. It would be wrong if we asked the question "Am I yoytze?" with an attitude of trying to get the obligation off our back. In fact, the halachic compendium, Mishnah Berurah, points out that those that pray with the attitude of seeing prayer as a load on your back that you're trying to shove off do not fully fulfill their mitzvah to pray.

It makes sense right? You're coming to talk to God. Coming to minyan only to be yoytze and avoid feeling guilty for not coming shows a lack of respect. What if you invited someone to your house and when they come you can tell that they're not there because they want to be with you, but only to be yoytze a social obligation to you. That doesn't feel good, does it?

The Talmud goes even further and says you should not "throw blessings out of your mouth". Meaning when you're about to break the bread or eat anything we shouldn't moan and go "Oy, I have to be yoytze the blessing. Let me throw the words as fast as I can out of my mouth. I'M HUNGRY." Would you want someone to give you thanks just to be yoytze the "thank you" to you? (See this Seinfeld clip for what a forced thank you looks like. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qjw5DtxlKaA)

Finally the Tochacha in Parshat Bechukotai this week details all the consequences that will befall the Jewish people if they forsake Hashem and the Torah. One point that the Torah emphasizes is that these terrible things will happen if the Jewish nation has an attitude of keri (Hebrew for overcasualness or disespect) towards God as God will return the favor by treating us with disrespect.

We do not pray to be yoytze prayer. We do not pray to be yoytze blessings. And we do not have kids to be yoytze having kids. That's not a reason at all to have kids just to get them out of the way so you can be free when you're 30 or 40. Imagine how the kid must feel growing up in a house where he was only born out of a sense that his parents just wanted to be yoytze. That's an existential crisis I don't want to have.

So what's the lesson? Let's love our kids and show them the true attention and affection that comes when you value someone intead of just trying to be yoytze your obligations to them. (See this clip from the movie "Fences" to hear Denzel Washington iilustrate this attitude. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tVxYCeRXzGo)

And let's say our blessings with a real sense of gratitude to God for the food that we have and for the amazing people who strive to bring it to us during this pandemic.

And when we pray, we can pray to feel that inner closeness to God. Just because we can't be yoytze tefillah bitzibbur (Jewish communal prayer) at this time doesn't mean we can't fulfill the goal of prayer.

Shabbat Shalom!

* We joined KI when our son Evan was in medical school at the university of Alabama in Birmingham. This remarkable shul, with a great history, is a treasure in the South, and Rabbi Rube is a truly outstanding Rabbi of the young generation.

Rav Kook Torah
Bechukotai: Why Exile?

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

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

The Purpose of Israel in their Land

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

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

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

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

Staying in Babylonia

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

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

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

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

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

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

Footnote:

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

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

Alone in the World: 43 Years Since Entebbe

By Lazer Gurkow* © 2020

Entebbe

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

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

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

Alone in The World

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

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

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

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

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

Begin's Bible Group

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Finding Respect

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

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

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

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

FOOTNOTES:

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

2. Numbers 23:9.

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

* Spiritual leader of Congregation Beth Tefilah in London, Ontario and frequent contributor to Chabad on line.

Behar - Bechukotai: The Freedom of the Sabbath

by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky*

G-d instructed Moses to tell the Jewish people, "When you enter the land...the land must observe a year of rest for G-d." (Vayikra 25:2)

Just as the weekly Sabbath is intended to allow us the freedom to pursue spiritual growth, the same is true of the sabbatical year. G-d therefore instructs us to envision the sabbatical year as the goal of the work we do during the six preceding years, keeping it constantly in mind throughout as we work toward it. In this way, the inspiration of the sabbatical year will sanctify, energize, and focus the work we perform during the "mundane" years, bringing them Divinely-blessed success and infusing them with the joy of optimism and purpose.

The same holds true for the weekly Sabbath. Keeping the goal of the Sabbath in mind during the workweek sanctifies, energizes, and focuses our work, bringing success, joy, and optimism to the entire week.

"Entering our land" is also a metaphor for setting up our homes, whether at the beginning of our married lives or whenever we seek to revitalize our home life. We should set up our homes with the goal of the Sabbath in mind, creating an atmosphere conducive to spiritual growth and harmony. This way, every Sabbath will be imbued with spiritual content, thereby being a source of renewal and hope for ourselves, our families, and our guests.

From Kehot's **Daily Wisdom #2**

* An insight from the Rebbe.

With heartfelt wishes for a healthy Shabbos,

Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman

Kehot Publication Society

Likutei *Divrei* Torah

Gleanings of Divrei Torah on Parashat Hashavuah via the Internet

Shabbat Shalom

Volume 26, Issue 29 **Shabbat Parashat Behar-Bechukotai** **5780 B"H**

Covenant and Conversation
Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

The Power of a Curse

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.

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.

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.

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.

[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.

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

"And you shall count for yourselves seven cycles of Sabbatical years, seven years, seven times… forty-nine years… you shall sanctify the fiftieth year and proclaim freedom throughout the land for all its inhabitants; it shall be the Jubilee year for you." (Leviticus 25:8-10)

This commandment to count seven cycles of Sabbatical years leading up to the 50th Jubilee year of proclaiming freedom throughout the land, is clearly reminiscent of the biblical commands we read last week (Parshat Emor): "Count for yourselves [from the day of your bringing the barley 'omer wave offering] seven complete weeks… you shall count fifty days…" from the day after our exodus from Egypt until the Festival of the first fruits (bikkurim), the festival commemorating the Revelation of God's Torah at Sinai (Lev. 23:15-17).

What is the significance of this striking parallelism between the counting of the seven weeks between Passover and Shavuot and the counting of the seven sabbatical years leading up to the Jubilee year? What is the true message behind the daily count of sefirat ha'omer, the period which we are currently marking?

There are three words which express the concept of freedom: hofesh, dror and herut. Hofesh appears in the Book of Exodus (21:2) in the context of the Hebrew slave leaving the homestead of his owner; at the end of his sixth year of employ he becomes (hofshi hinam), "completely free," without any obligation whatsoever to his former master.

The second word, dror, has just been cited in our present reading of Behar, in which "freedom" (dror) is to be proclaimed throughout the land on the advent of the Jubilee year.

But the Festival of Passover, which celebrates our exodus from Egyptian servitude, is referred to by our Sages as zman herutenu, the time of our herut – a non-biblical word with Aramaic roots that connotes freedom. Why do our Sages pass over the two biblical Hebrew words hofesh and dror in describing our Festival of Freedom in favor of herut?

In his illuminating study Escape from Freedom, the philosopher and political theorist Erich Fromm (1900-1980) distinguishes between freedom from something and freedom for something. The former—the mere ridding oneself of duties and obligations—will, at best, produce a monotonous existence of boredom, aimlessness, and sometimes even depression; at worst, it will lead to alcohol and drug addiction, wild licentiousness and even criminal acts of depravity. Many societies would rather succumb to a totalitarian regime of enslavement rather than risk the challenges of the responsibility of freedom.

It is from this vantage point that Viktor Frankl (1905-1997), author of From Death-Camp to Existentialism and founder of the branch of psychoanalysis which he calls "logotherapy," insists that the most essential human drive is not a search for pleasure, as Freud would maintain, or a search for power, as Adler and Jung suggest. Rather, it is the search for meaning, the human need to carve out a life of significance and worthwhile purpose. Freedom from enslavement must be linked indelibly with the belief of the individual that he/she is empowered to forge for him/herself a life dedicated to an important goal and purpose.

Hence, our Bible begins with the creation of the world, positing that every human being is created "in the image of God," with a portion of the Lord on High within the very essence of his/her being," so that he/she becomes commanded (and thereby empowered) to "develop the earth and preserve it," to "perfect our imperfect world in the Kingship of the Divine" (Gen. 1:27; 2:7, 15 and the Aleinu prayer).

By reliving God's primordial week of creation during our human weekly cycle of "working the world" for six days and resting in God's presence on the seventh, we hopefully rekindle our task to perfect the world as God's partners every single week! And hofesh in this context is our freedom of choice not to do whatever we wish but rather to choose good over evil, God over Satan, creation over destruction, eternal life in the generations we fostered, dedicated to Go-liness over instant death after an existence spent in futile pursuit of vanity and emptiness.

The word dror is used to express the period of human perfection, redemption (ge'ula), described in our Jubilee year, when all slaves will be freed, when everyone's land will provide sufficient produce for all, when all debts will be rescinded, when everyone will be returned to their ancestral homestead, when all the needy of the world will be sustained by their communities. Dror is the purpose for which Israel and humanity was created; the society and world which Israel and humanity must recreate in God's loving partners.

And do our Sages refer to the time of our liberation from Egyptian enslavement as herut, which derives from the Hebrew ahrayut, responsibility: the path-way toward the final accomplishment of universal dror , the responsibility of freedom for, the responsibility of accepting the formidable task of partnership with the Divine, the responsibility of protecting our siblings (ahim) unfrt Hof,, the responsibility of protecting every stranger (aher) who is also our sibling under God, the responsibility of going first and saying "aharai" (after me), and the responsibility of bringing the world to its aharit hayamim, the final stage of redemption, the Messianic Age.

And so, as soon as we became free, we started to count; only for a free person does every day count, only for a free person is every day fraught with infinite possibilities of productivity and meaning. We count until we receive our Torah, which is our blueprint for the creation of a perfected world. And you will note that although the Bible commands that we count 50 days – we stop at 49. That is also why the Festival is called Shavuot – because we are still a work-in-progress, we have not yet reached the goal of the Messianic Age, we still await the Messiah, we are still in the Process, not yet in the Attainment, the era of Redemption. And perhaps that is what it means to be human, to be constantly striving – and growing, and improving. A great Sage once said, "Pity the man who has achieved his ideal; he has no reason to continue living!" And so in the teachings of the Sacred Zohar, the fiftieth rung of the ladder is where the loving Lord is to be found, Alone in Glorious Splendor.

Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Shemittah, Mt. Sinai, and the Life's Ultimate Challenge

You've Done it Once—You can do it Again

Parshas Behar begins with the pesukim, "Hashem spoke to Moshe on Mount Sinai saying: Speak to the Children of Israel and say to them, when you come into the land that I give you, the land shall observe a Sabbath rest for Hashem" [Bamidbar 25:1-2]. In one of the most famous Rashis in all of Chumash, Rashi asks: "What is the subject of shemittah doing

next to Mount Sinai?" All the mitzvos were given on Sinai, so why does the Torah — only here by shemittah — introduce the associated laws by specifying that they were given at Sinai?

Rashi gives one answer to this question, the Ramban mentions another. I would like to quote an answer I saw brought in the name of the Oznayim L'Torah, from Rav Zalman Sorotzkin. However, I would like to preface it with another interesting observation that I saw, which will help give a better understanding of the comment of the Oznayim L'Torah.

Chazal cross-reference a pasuk in Psalms to the mitzvah of shemittah: "Bless Hashem, O His angels; the strong warriors who do His bidding, to obey the voice of His word" [Tehillim 103:20]. The Psalmist is asking the Master of the Universe to give a blessing to "the Mighty Ones," the ones who do His wishes, to listen to His words. The Medrash says that the term "the Mighty Ones" in this pasuk is referring to people who observe the shemittah. In normal circumstances, a person does a mitzvah for one hour, one day, one week, or one month. However, shemittah is a mitzvah that is done for a whole year! It may be hard to abstain from forbidden work on Shabbos — for a day — but we do observe that mitzvah. It may be hard to not eat chametz for a week, but we do that mitzvah as well. However, most mitzvos which require sacrifice have a relatively short time duration.

The mitzvah of shemittah is different. Shemittah requires people to sit and do nothing, and to forgo their normal means of earning a living, for an entire year. That is a real sacrifice! The farmer needs to watch his field lie fallow. He must watch his neighbors come and take that which grows on its own from his field (because it is all hefker [ownerless]). He sees the animals come in and eat to their delight, and he needs to sit there and do nothing for the entire year! This is very difficult.

The Gemara applies to this the Mishnaic statement in Ethics of the Fathers: "Who is the mighty person? It is he who conquers his evil inclination." A person who has the strength of character to listen to the Almighty, and have faith that He will provide for his living despite the fact that he is not working, is displaying a tremendous amount of Gevurah!

There is another place where Chazal reference this very same pasuk from Tehillim (Bless Hashem, O His angels; the strong warriors who do His bidding, to obey the voice of His word"). In connection with the acceptance of the commandments on Mt. Sinai, when the Jews proclaimed, "We will do and we will hear" (na'aseh v'nishmah) the rabbis teach: Rav Yishmael said, "At the moment that Israel stated na'aseh prior to nishma, a Heavenly Voice came out and said to them 'My sons, who revealed to you this secret that the ministering angels utilize, as it is written: "Bless Hashem, O His angels; the strong warriors who do His bidding, to obey the voice of His word?""'

So we see that there are two places in Chazal where this pasuk of praise is used. There are two categories of people who are given this accolade: The people who keep the shemittah, and the people who said na'aseh v'nishma by Har Sinai. Superficially, these seem to be two totally disparate, unrelated incidents. However, in actuality, mitzvas shemittah and kabalas haTorah are really two sides of the same coin. When Klal Yisrael said "na'aseh v'nishmah," they were overcoming one of the most basic human elements: "I want to be in charge. I do not want to sign blank checks." When Klal Yisrael said "na'aseh v'nishmah," they, in effect, signed a blank check, because they did not know what was coming. They said, "Yes we will do whatever You ask us to do. Now, what is it that You are asking us to do?" Who does that? It takes a tremendous amount of strength of character, which goes against almost all human intuition. They did it anyway because they were giborim [strong in character].

That same inner strength is evident by those who observe shemittah. A person wants to fend for himself. He put an enormous amount of blood, sweat, and tears into his fields, orchards, and vineyards during the past six years of the agricultural cycle. Now he is expected to sit back and let the weeds grow, and allow anyone who wants, to come and take the produce, as if his property were ownerless. This also requires tremendous gevurah, tremendous strength of character.

Therefore, the Medrash says that the pasuk of "…the strong warriors who do His bidding, to obey the voice of His word" can be said about both the mekablei haTorah — the ones who said na'aseh v'nishmah — and about the farmers who sit by and let their fields remain fallow.

This entire preface was from the Minchas Asher (Rav Asher Weiss). Now, we can appreciate the insight of Rav Zalman Sorotzkin regarding Rashi's famous question.

"And the L-rd spoke to Moshe on Mount Sinai saying…" He is about to give the people a mitzvah they have never heard about before — the mitzvah of shemittah. You need to sit and watch everyone, including the animals, take that which grows on your land, and do nothing about it. Moshe Rabbeinu tells the nation – you are capable of doing this. Do you know why? This is the entire experience of Har Sinai over again. This is exactly what you did at the time of the Revelation. At Har Sinai, you demonstrated the strength of character to say, "We will do and we will hear." "And the L-rd spoke to Moshe on Mount Sinai saying" telegraphs a message to the people. This is Har Sinai Round Two. You did it once — you can do it again! The Jewish people have within them the gevurah to overcome natural instincts and follow the command of Hashem, wherever it takes them.

Rav Asher Weiss references something that we have mentioned on other occasions. The Vilna Gaon (1720-1797) writes in the Even Shlomo, "Man's main life (challenge) in this world is conquering one's (evil) nature." Overcoming his natural inclination is every person's prime spiritual task in this world. That is why we are put on this earth. And someone who cannot correct these natural tendencies – what is his purpose in life? The very same concept is expressed as well by a famous Chassidic personality of the same era as the Gaon – the Noam Elimelech (Elimelech Weisblum of Lizhensk – 1717–1787). The Noam Elimelech writes, "Man was only created in this world to break his nature."

This was the na'aseh v'nishmah of Har Sinai, and therein lies our ability to keep the mitzvah of shemittah which was given "…B'Har Sinai leimor."

"If Your Brother Becomes Impoverished" — What is the Significance of the Word 'Imach'?

The pasuk in Parshas Behar says: "If your brother becomes impoverished and his hand falters with you (imach), you shall hold on to him (whether he is) a convert or a resident, so that he can live with you" [Vayikra 25:35]. There is a certain peculiarity in the way this pasuk is written. The pasuk would read perfectly fine without the word imach (literally 'with you') inserted after the words "…and his hand falters." What is added by inserting this word?

The sefer Yismach Yehudah (by a Rabbi Yehudah Jacobowitz from Lakewood) quotes a sefer which I have never heard of, called the Shevet Mishor, by Rav Meir Leib Frye. He wants to say that the way the pasuk is worded teaches a special lesson that is most applicable in our own day and age.

The Gemara says "Poverty in a person's home is extremely debilitating" [Bava Basra 116a]. Here too, the Torah uses a peculiar choice of words: "B'soch beiso shel adam" [in the midst of a person's house]. What do these words mean? He writes that there are two types of poor people. There is a person whom everyone knows is poor. Therefore, when Purim or Yom Tov arrives, people help him with his various expenses. However, there is another type of poor person. This person lives in a wonderful house, and he has all the outside trappings of wealth — a nice car, a nice house, etc. But no one knows that this fellow is the victim of a sub-prime mortgage crisis. Nobody knows that he is near bankruptcy and that his entire apparent lifestyle is just a facade. There is no public collection for this person. "I should give him money? He should give me money!"

This is what the Gemara means when it phrases the statement as, "Poverty is debilitating when it is b'soch beiso shel adam" — hidden within the four walls of his house — such that no one is aware of it. The homeowner is the only person who knows he is facing financial disaster, and that the banks are about to foreclose, not only on his house but on everything he owns. The knowledge of his situation is limited to "toch beiso shel adam." Only a few close friends know the truth. The Torah says that "when your brother becomes poor and his hand falters with you (imach)…" Everyone else does not know about it, except for those few individuals who are from his circle of friends. They are also wealthy, and they do know the situation. He has always been in their peer group, but now he is facing financial disaster. There are some situations that only a chosen few know about. In those situations, it is the chosen few who have the obligation to do something about it. In these situations, "you shall strengthen him, and your brother will live with you (imach)." You need to restore him to the way he once was. It is your responsibility to help him out in an extraordinary fashion.

When a person is — and always has been — poor, he does not expect and does not deserve extravagant support. But when a person who has always lived in comfort now faces being on the breadline, that experience is devastating. Since he has always been financially "with you," it is your obligation to dig down into your deep pockets, so that "your brother will continue to live with you." (v'chai achicha imach).

A Tale of Two Ta'amei Temurah – Rambam and Sefer HaChinuch

The end of Parshas Bechukosai contains the concept of temurah. There is an entire tractate in the Talmud devoted to these laws. Temurah is a situation where a person sanctifies an animal, designating it to be a Korban, and then he wants to change his mind. He decides that rather than offering this animal as his sacrifice, he wants to offer another animal in its stead. Even if in fact the second animal is superior to the one he initially designated (meaning the Beis HaMikdash will wind up getting a nicer animal for the mizbayach) nevertheless it is forbidden to swap animals once the first animal has been designated as holy. If in fact one attempts to make such a swap, declaring "zeh temuras zeh" (this one will be in place of this one), the result is that both animals are now holy.

The Rambam and Sefer HaChinuch take different approaches in explaining the laws of temurah.

The Rambam writes at the end of hilchos temurah [4:13]: "Even though everything in the Torah is a chok [a law for which we do not grasp its ultimate reason], it is appropriate to analyze them (chukim) and wherever a rationale can be given, we should offer that rationale. It appears to me that both the halacha of temurah (where both the animals become holy) and the halacha that when one tries to redeem an animal that he has previously donated to the Bais Hamikdash, he must add a twenty-five percent surcharge, are cases of the Torah descending into the thoughts of man, which are motivated by his evil inclination. It is the nature of people to want to amass wealth, and to hold onto their possessions."

This is indeed one of the great truths of life. People love money. Someone does not need to be the Rambam to advance such an idea. People are worried about their financial holdings.

The Rambam continues: "And even though he went ahead and made a donation to the Bais Hamikdash, it is possible that he has second thoughts and regrets his generosity. In retracting his previous donation, he is tempted to redeem or replace it with something of lesser value."

Basically, we need to be afraid that the fellow — as a result of his "second thoughts" — is trying to cheat hekdesh. In a "moment of weakness," he transferred ownership of a beautiful animal to the treasurer of the Bais Hamikdash. Then when "his senses get the better of him" he asks himself, "What in the world did I do? Does Hashem really care if it is a beautiful cow or an ugly cow? A sacrifice is a sacrifice. It is just going to be slaughtered anyhow!" The Torah is trying to pre-empt this tendency to renege on his pledge to hekdesh, so the Torah insures that any person who tries to undo his moment of generosity will pay dearly for that attempt. Even if in fact the second animal is superior to the first animal, there are no exceptions to this rule. If the Torah would allow us a "free switch" under any circumstances, there is no end to the abuse this privilege would cause. Therefore, the Torah insists, "and it will be that the original animal and its substitute will both be holy." This is the opinion of the Rambam.

The Sefer HaChinuch takes a different approach, offering the following very interesting idea: Someone should not fool around with sacred items. He writes: "Therefore, in order to implant in our hearts fear and reverence of matters that are holy, the Torah wants us to respect holy items. Kedusha is something which we must relate to with reverence. When someone enters the Bais Hamikdash, he must fear it. Scripture therefore commands us not to tamper with the holiness of donated items.

Once an item has become sanctified, that status should remain permanently. Once an animal is holy, it should not enter our mind to switch that sanctity onto a different animal. If a person tries to make such a switch, the Torah nullifies his intent, and both animals will become sanctified. The end result of trying to remove holiness will be just the opposite – it will multiply holiness!"

Rav Pam extrapolates this idea of the Sefer HaChinuch, and suggests that this idea (i.e. — that anyone trying to tamper with or destroy kedusha will find that kedusha spreads) has been the story of Jewish history. In Egypt, they wanted to destroy the Jewish people. What happened? Kedusha spread. "The more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and the more they spread." [Shemos 1:12]. Pharaoh wanted to make the Jewish people subhuman in the eyes of the masses. What happened? At the time of the Exodus, "Also a mixed multitude (of Egyptian people) went up with them" [Shemos 12:38]. Trying to destroy the holiness of the Jewish people is doomed to failure. The Ribono shel Olam says that this is the nature of kedusha. Try to squelch it, try to destroy it, try to get rid of it — and it spreads.

The wicked Haman attempted to destroy, eradicate, and murder all the Jews from young lad until old man. He desired to uproot kedusha. However, the nature of kedusha is that the more one tries to destroy it, the more it spreads. "And many of the masses of the people (of Persia) converted" [Esther 8:17]. They started converting in droves. How do we explain this phenomenon? Perhaps you can argue that "Everybody wants to be with a winner; they want to get on the band wagon." No! It was more than that. It is the nature of kedusha to expand. This is what the parsha of temurah teaches us.

Rav Pam added that many of the people who founded the State of Israel came from Socialist, Communist, and Bundist backgrounds. They made it part of their agenda to uproot the sanctity of Israel. "We will be like all the nations, O House of Israel" [Shmuel I 8:20]. What happens when one tries to do that to kedusha? It spreads. That is why the grandchildren of some of those people are the baalei teshuvah today who are learning Torah in Ponnevez and Mir and Brisk, and all the Yeshivos that are sprouting up throughout the length and breadth of Eretz Yisrael, as never before. Why? This is just the nature of kedusha. They try to wipe it out and decimate it, but the Ribono shel Olam says that is not going to happen. "You start up with kedusha — it is going to spread."

This is the lesson of temurah. Not only did you not accomplish what you set out to do, but instead of one animal being holy, now two animals are holy. Such is the nature of kedusha.

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

Rabbi Mayer Twersky

Mah Hashem Elokecha Sho'el Me'imach[1]

"Yisrael are holy," and accordingly aggrieved over the interruption of t'filah b'tzibur; some are even advocating that minyanim be immediately reconvened. "Yisrael are

compassionate," and it is only natural that our rabanim have been touched by the pleadings of their congregants; some even want to accommodate these pleadings. B'nei Yisrael, however, are also "exceedingly wise". Accordingly, let us be wise in our reflections and reactions.

[It is certainly true that the pain we are experiencing at being unable to engage in t'filah b'tzibur is proper and fitting[2]; the following is exclusively addressing the practical initiatives being undertaken to renew minyanim right now. Our prayer, as well, is that, with God's help, the situation will significantly change for the better and thus warrant a p'sak halacha that allows for the reconvening of minyanim.]

שוּב מַעֲשֶׂה בְּנָכְרִי אֶחָד שֶׁבָּא לִפְנֵי שַׁמַּאי א"ל גִּיירֵנִי ע"מ שֶׁתְּלַמְּדֵנִי כָּל הַתּוֹרָה כֻּלָּהּ כְּשֶׁאֲנִי עוֹמֵד עַל רֶגֶל אַחַת כו' בָּא לִפְנֵי הִלֵּל גִּיירֵהּ אָמַר לוֹ דָּעֲלָךְ סָנֵי לְחַבְרָךְ לֹא תַּעֲבִיד זוֹ הִיא כָּל הַתּוֹרָה כֻּלָּהּ וְאִידָךְ פֵּרוּשָׁהּ הוּא זִיל גְּמוֹר (שַׁבָּת ל"א.) ופירש"י (שָׁם) ד"ה דְּעָלָךְ סָנֵי לְחַבְרָךְ לֹא תַּעֲבִיד רַעֲךָ וְרֵעַ אָבִיךָ אַל תַּעֲזֹב - זֶה הקב"ה אַל תַּעֲבֹר עַל דְּבָרָיו כו'

Another incident occurred: a gentile came before Shamai and said: Convert me on the condition that you will teach me the entire Torah while I stand on one foot ... [He subsequently] came before Hillel [and presented the identical challenging request]. Hillel converted him and instructed him: that which is hateful to you, do not do to your friend; this is the entire Torah - everything else is commentary. Go study! Rashi (ad loc) s.v. de'alach: "Do not abandon [He who is] your friend, and the friend of your father (Mishlei 27:10)", this [refers to] God; do not transgress His words...

The quintessence of Torah, then, is acting in accordance with retzon Hashem, God's will. No facet of Torah - be it Torah study, tefilah, or even love of God - possesses independent spiritual value and legitimacy per se. The metric we use to evaluate the propriety of every action has to be whether it ultimately reflects the retzon Hashem as delineated by the Halacha at a given time.

By way of illustration, let us consider the following examples:

Torah study "equals all [mitzvos] (Peah 1:1)", and "all that you yearn for can not compare to it (Mishlei 3:15)". Nonetheless, at times, it is [with exception of mourning-related subject matter] prohibited during the shiva period and in halachically-deemed unclean areas. One who engages in Torah study in either of these two situations is sinning.

Tefilah, one of the loftiest spiritual forces in the world as well as a telos of the world[3], is nevertheless prohibited if one either feels the urge to attend to excretory needs or is in an area deemed halachically unclean; in either of these situations, prayer is deemed "an abomination[4]."

In certain circumstances, an action - holy and exalted under normal conditions - metamorphoses from a very great mitzvah into an equally severe aveirah. Such determinations are contingent exclusively on their fealty to retzon Hashem.

Today, we face a great danger. COVID-19 is an extremely contagious and, at times, fatal disease. In general, when equipped with the requisite knowledge and understanding of a dangerous illness, we are positioned to take all relevant, possible measures, thereby, at times, minimizing, to a degree, the danger. The opposite, however, is equally true; lack of requisite knowledge and understanding increases the danger of such diseases. COVID-19 is a new, singular disease. Accordingly, even infectious disease experts are operating in unchartered territory in their valiant attempts to tentatively guide the public. Indeed, the widespread devastation has been, in part, made possible by our lack of knowledge and understanding of the disease and its dynamics.

Torah is the embodiment of retzon Hashem. While tefillah b'tzibur is indeed a pillar of avodas Hashem, every schoolchild knows that it doesn't override the obligation to safeguard life; it doesn't justify exposure to safek sakanah. In the USA[5], given the current state of the pandemic and our dangerous lack of knowledge, assembling for tefillah b'tzibur contravenes retzon Hashem. Such faux religious gatherings endanger the community, and, in the current situation, transform what is usually a great mitzvah into a great aveirah, r'l.

One facet of wisdom is foresight. Even sincere attempts to design social-distant compliant gatherings are dangerously ill-advised [and thus prohibited]. They fail to realistically take into account the likelihood [inevitability?] of unsuccessful implementation.

This truth is, and has been, evident in many different ways, and many different contexts. To provide but one illustration: the organizers of the recent funeral were well-intentioned and motivated by the mitzvah of kavod ha'mes, according final respect to the deceased; they planned a social-distance compliant funeral, and even received a permit. However, they failed to anticipate the likely [inevitable?] outcome. We all know how that episode ended. The deceased, zt"l, was not accorded final respect, but unparalleled indignity. Tosafos (Bava Kama 80b s.v. Omer) comment that we refrain from burying the deceased on Shabbos by employing the services of a non-Jew:

לְפִי שֶׁהוּא מְכוֹעָר וּמְגֻנֶּה וּמִתְבַּיֵּשׁ שֶׁנִּקְבָּר בְּשַׁבָּת שֶׁנַּעֲשָׂה בְּאִסּוּר שַׁבָּת אֲפִלּוּ ע"י נָכְרִי - Since it is unbecoming, disgraceful, and humiliating that [the deceased] is being buried on Shabbos through a violation of Shabbos, even if performed by a non-Jew.

In our case, an inestimable indignity was perpetrated, however unintentionally, when - for the nominal honor of the deceased - people were exposed to danger and, additionally, a chilul Hashem ensued. Much to our dismay, currently the only way to bestow final honor upon the deceased is through very private burial.

Let us further bolster the point by considering the following instances:

וַיֹּאמֶר שָׁאוּל אֶל-שְׁמוּאֵל אֲשֶׁר שָׁמַעְתִּי בְּקוֹל ד' וגו' וַיִּקַּח הָעָם מֵהַשָּׁלָל צֹאן וּבָקָר רֵאשִׁית הַחֵרֶם לִזְבֹּחַ לַד' אֱלֹקֶיךָ בַּגִּלְגָּל.

And Shaul said to Shmuel, "Yes, I did hearken to the voice of the Lord ... And the people took from the spoil, sheep and oxen, the best of the ban, to sacrifice to your God in Gilgal[6]."How did Shmuel respond?

וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁמוּאֵל הֲחֵפֶץ לַד' בְּעֹלוֹת וּזְבָחִים כִּשְׁמֹעַ בְּקוֹל ד' הִנֵּה שְׁמֹעַ מִזֶּבַח טוֹב לְהַקְשִׁיב מֵחֶלֶב אֵילִים

And Shmuel said, "Has the Lord (as much) desire in burnt offerings and peace-offerings, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than a peace-offering; to hearken (is better) than the fat of rams (Shmuel "I" 15: 20-22). The exclusive obligation, concern, and fulfillment of avodas Hashem is heeding God's word and will. Even something as sanctified as korbanos becomes repugnant if it doesn't accord with God's stated will at that particular moment.

וַיִּיקַץ יַעֲקֹב מִשְּׁנָתוֹ וַיֹּאמֶר אָכֵן יֵשׁ ד' בַּמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה וְאָנֹכִי לֹא יָדָעְתִּי Yaakov awoke from his sleep. 'God is truly in this place,' he said, 'but I did not know it.' (B'reishis 28:16)'[7] Rashi, ad loc, following Chazal, elaborates: "שֶׁאִם יָדַעְתִּי לֹא יָשַׁנְתִּי בְּמָקוֹם קָדוֹשׁ כָּזֶה ...for if I had known, I would not have slept in such a holy place as this."

Yaakov Avinu, full of regret, was distressed at having inadvertently violated the sanctity of the Temple site. One might wonder about Yaakov Avinu's distress and regret; after all, he was granted a prophetic revelation during that self-same sleep. Why, then, the ensuing self-recriminations? We see, as Rav Velvel Soloveitchik zt"l incisively and instructively expounds, that even the goal of attaining prophetic revelation does not justify contravening God's will.

אָמַר ר"י אָמַר רַב גְּדוֹלָה הַכְנָסַת אוֹרְחִים מֵהַקְבָּלַת פְּנֵי הַשְּׁכִינָה דִּכְתִיב וַיֹּאמַר ד' אִם נָא מָצָאתִי חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ אַל נָא תַּעֲבֹר מֵעַל עַבְדֶּךָ - Rav Yehuda quoted from Rav: Welcoming guests is greater than receiving the Divine Presence, as is written (B'reishis 18:3): "And he said: Hashem, if I now find favor in your eyes, please do not turn away now from your servant".

Netziv, in his Ha'amek Davar, comments: אֶלָּא כָּךְ הָעִנְיָן כַּאֲשֶׁר שֶׁהָיָה א"א שֶׁקּוֹעֵ בְּאוֹתָהּ שָׁעָה בְּאַהֲבַת ד' וּבְהַקְבָּלַת פְּנֵי הַשְּׁכִינָה וּמִלְּבַד שֶׁהוּא תַּעֲנוּג נִפְלָא עוֹד הוּא מִצְוַת עֲשֵׂה וְאָהַבְתָּ אֵת ד' כְּמַבְאָר בְּמָקוֹמוֹ,

ומ"מ אי מִתְרַמֵּי אֵיזֶה מִצְוָה בְּשָׁעָה שֶׁהָאָדָם שָׁקוּעַ בְּאַהֲבַת ד' מְחֻיָּב לְהַפְסִיק מִמִּצְוַת אַהֲבָה שֶׁאֵין לָהּ זְמַן קָבוּעַ וע"ז אִיתָא בְּמַס' שַׁבָּת פ' מְפַנִּין גְּדוֹלָה מִצְוַת הַכְנָסַת אוֹרְחִין יוֹתֵר מֵהַקְבָּלַת פְּנֵי הַשְּׁכִינָה שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר עַל נָא תַּעֲבֹר מֵעַל עַבְדֶּךָ, וְאֵין הַכַּוָּנָה דְּמִי שֶׁמַּכְנִיס אוֹרֵחַ הוּא גָּדוֹל מִמִּי שֶׁזּוֹכֶה לְהַקְבִּיל פְּנֵי הַשְּׁכִינָה, אֶלָּא שֶׁהוּא גָּדוֹל לְדָחוּת הַקְבָּלַת פְּנֵי הַשְּׁכִינָה, שֶׁכָּךְ הוּא רְצוֹנוֹ יִת' שֶׁיִּהְיֶה מִצְוָה מְעַשִּׂית דּוֹחָה מִצְוָה זוֹ שֶׁאֵין לָהּ שִׁעוּר וּזְמַן - Rather, the proper understanding is that Avraham Avinu, at that time, was completely immersed in love of God and receiving the Divine Presence. Now, aside from the fact that it is a sublime pleasure, it is also a positive commandment "and you shall love Hashem ..." as explained [in the commentary on that verse]. However, if a mitzvah presents itself at a time when one is absorbed in love of God, he is obligated to interrupt the mitzvah of love of God, which [is unbounded, and thus] has no fixed time.

The Gemara in Shabbos (127a) reflects this principle in its teaching that "welcoming guests is greater than receiving the Divine Presence, as is written (B'reishis 18:3): 'And he said: Hashem, if I now find favor in your eyes, please do not turn away now from your servant' ". The intent is not that one who welcomes a guest is greater than one who merits to receive the Divine Presence. Instead Chazal are instructing that welcoming guests practically [i.e. not axiologically] overrides receiving the Divine Presence. It is the will of [God], blessed be He, that a mitzvah which is [currently, temporarily] actionable defers [the mitzvah of ahavas Hashem which is unbounded both temporally and quantitatively.

Even total immersion in love of God is not always favorable - if one were to defer welcoming guests, hachnasas orchim, because he is engrossed in love of God, ahavas Hashem, he would have committed a sin, since "that is the will of God, blessed be He."

I heard the following story from my brother, Ha'Gaon Hakadosh Rav Moshe Twersky zt"l hy"d, who, in turn, heard it from Ha'Gaon Rav Gershon Zaks zt"l: There was once an emergency meeting of gedolim to discuss potential responses to a harsh, cruel governmental edict. The discussion continued through the day until it was almost sunset. One of the participants suggested that they should stop to daven Mincha. The Chafetz Chaim zt"l, astonished, lovingly reproached him: "Mincha ligt ihr offen kup?! Mincha is on your mind[8]?!" The importance and sanctity of tefilah (prayer) is indeed inestimable, and yet - in certain circumstances - it is forbidden to pray!

A similar story is told about Rav Chaim Soloveitchik zt"l[9]. Rav Chaim encountered someone who was compelled to eat on Yom Kippur for reasons of health and was saddened by that fact. Rav Chaim asked him if he would be similarly saddened were he to make a bris on Shabbos. Rav Chaim paused and then concluded: He who legislates the performance of melacha on Shabbos on the occasion of a bris bizmano, at times commands, for reasons of health, to eat on Yom Kippur! HKB"H who commands us to fast on Yom Kippur sometimes mandates that we eat on Yom Kippur; HKB"H who commands us to desist from melacha on Shabbos sometimes stipulates that we actually engage in melacha. Even fasting on Yom Kippur and desisting from melacha on Shabbos are not, in an absolute sense, intrinsically sanctified, spiritual modes. In the service of God, there is only one factor: retzon Hashem.

When I was young, I recall that it was widely reported that a prominent Jew suffered a heart attack on Shabbos and insisted on waiting until after Shabbos to travel to the hospital [and thereafter died]. I can still clearly see my grandfather's (Rav Soloveitchik zt"l) expression at the time, and how aggrieved and agitated he was over the disgracing and distortion of Torah. There are times when God wants us to fulfill the mitzvah of desisting from melacha on Shabbos, and there are times when he wants us to fulfill the mitzvah of "take heed and watch yourself very carefully, u'shmor nafshecha me'od"; who would second-guess Hashem's directives?

On a different occasion, in response to an exaggerated, immoderate form of marking Yom Ha'Atzmaut, my grandfather (Rav Soloveitchik) remarked that it is possible to make an avodah zarah out of anything, even Eretz Yisrael. Properly understood, he meant as follows: everything is conditional, contingent; their value is precisely as much as is accorded to it by God. On a deeper level, HKB"H is the exclusive source of any and all value propositions. Idolatry r'l, essentially consists of conferring exaggerated value or status on an entity, often resulting in the heretical misperception that the entity in fact possesses an independent, autonomous value. By extension, when we hold a mitzvah to have a greater value than accorded to it by Hashem, thereby insinuating independent, absolute value, our distortion borders on the idolatrous, r"l.

How frighteningly powerful and compelling: one can distort any mitzvah or Torah value in a way that borders on the idolatrous. It behooves us to reflect upon this seminal teaching and internalize it, so that we don't, God forbid, violate it.

May the Merciful One place our lot with those who carry out His will.

[1]The following is a translation of Rav Twersky's Hebrew-language essay מה ד' אלוקיך שואל מעמך. The translators take responsibility for any inaccuracies/ infelicities. (Talmidim)
[2] See B'rachos 5a: "These (forms of suffering) can (potentially) be considered to be trials of love (and not punitive): those which don't interfere with t'filah"
[3] See Rabbeinu Yonah, Avos, 1:2<
[4]Berachos 31a
[5] I am not sufficiently familiar with the facts on ground in other locales
[6]Translations from this section of Sefer Shmuel are those of Rabbi AJ Rosenberg zt"l (Judaica Press).
[7] Many translations of Chumash herein are from Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan zt"l (The Living Torah).
[8] See Tur and Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 93.
[9] See Rav Avigdor Neventzahl's note to Mishnah Berurah 618.

Rabbi Yakov Haber
Covenant and Kinyan

"And Hashem spoke to Moshe at Mount Sinai saying: ... When you enter the land which I am giving you, and the land shall rest a Sabbath for Hashem" (VaYikra 25:1-2).

Since at this point the mishkan already was standing and Hashem was communicating with Moshe Rabbeinu from the mishkan itself (VaYikra 1:1), no longer on Har Sinai - combined with the fact that none of the other multiple commandments from the beginning of Chumash VaYikra until this point were stated as being at Har Sinai - the commentaries ask why Sinai is mentioned at this point. (See Rashi, Ibn Ezra, Seforno, and Ramban among others.)

Ibn Ezra, utilizing the principle of ein mukdam umeuchar baTorah - the Torah does not always follow a chronological order, offers a unique, complex explanation as to why Har Sinai is mentioned here. He writes that the commandment of shemitta was actually given (both from Hashem to Moshe and from Moshe to Bnei Yisrael) much earlier at Har Sinai before the mishkan was built. Why then was it placed here? He explains that the Torah was given to the Jewish people as a bris, a covenant, as described in parshas Mishpatim at which time Moshe read the Seifer HaBris, the Book of the Covenant, to Am Yisrael, an altar was built and sacrifices were offered. In addition, the blood of the korbanos, referred to as "dam habris", was sprinkled on the people by Moshe Rabbeinu (Shemos 24:6-8). This covenant actually included the blessings and curses of parshas Bechukosai which are frequently called a bris (VaYikra 26:9,15,25,44,45. Also see Ibn Ezra to 26:25.) However, the Torah delayed their recording to this point instead of placing them earlier on when the bris of Har Sinai was described. Once again, why the delay? Ibn Ezra answers that concerning the prohibition of arayos, forbidden relations, listed in parshiyos Acharei-Mos and Kedoshim, given after Har Sinai, the Torah states that this is "mitena"ai ha"aretz", among the stipulations necessary to keep in order to stay in Eretz Yisrael; if the Jewish people violate arayos, the land will "vomit them out" (18:28, 20:22). Shemitta is also mentioned in the tocheicha as being "mitena"ai ha"aretz", violation of which can lead to exile (26:34:43, Avos 5:9). In order to juxtapose the two sets of commandments whose observance allows for continued stay in the land, and whose violation leads to the opposite, chas v"shalom, the Torah records the elaboration of the laws of shemitta after the commandments concerning arayos and not next to the description of the events of Har

Sinai where they were actually commanded.

Ramban accepts Ibn Ezra"s premise that there is a linkage between observance of the laws against forbidden arayos and the mitzvah of shemitta as conditions to hold onto Eretz Yisrael, but disputes his application of ein mukdam umeuchar baTorah. Ramban boldly asserts that the original bris of Sinai, as a result of the sin of the Golden Calf was seemingly nullified. (See below that he strongly implies that it was not actually eliminated but was treated by Hashem, to some extent, as if it were so.) As a result, a new treaty was forged between Hashem Yisborach and the Jewish people. It was this new bris which forms the content of the alos and kelalos of parshas Bechukosai. Since the original covenant had been, to some extent, violated, Hashem insisted on strengthening the force of the bris with threats of exile and other suffering if its content were to be violated by Bnei Yisrael again. This concept of a new bris is directly referenced after the cheit ha"eigel in parshas Ki Sisa: "Behold I am forging a bris; before your nation I shall perform wonders..." (Shemos 34:10). Its content was revealed to Moshe at Sinai and was related to the Jewish people in our parshiyos of Behar and Bechukosai. Shemitta had been one of the original mitzvos that was a prominent component of the bris as recorded in parshas Mishpatim (23:10-11). It became an even more prominent part of the new covenant with more detailed elaboration of its laws. The mention of "Behar Sinai" with regard to shemitta in our parsha, according to Ramban, refers to the commandment that G-d told Moshe in conjunction with the giving of the second luchos after the cheit ha"eigel as part of the process of the renewal of the covenant. It was only taught to the Jewish people at this point.

What emerges then from the pesukim as elaborated upon by these commentaries is that the Nosein haTorah did not just command us in a set of mitzvos but insisted that we enter into a mutual treaty with Him. The famous statement of "na"aseh v"nishma" (Shemos 24:7) represented the Jewish people"s acceptance of the original covenant of Sinai. The phenomenon of a "national convention" leading to a covenant with G-d repeats itself throughout Jewish history. Earlier, the founding father of the Jewish nation, Avraham Avinu, entered into two brisos with Hashem, the Bris bein HaBesarim (Bereishis 15) and the bris mila (ibid. 17). In addition to the two Sinaitic ones mentioned by Ramban, a third covenant was established with the Jewish people at arvos Moav (Devarim 28:69, 29:9 ff.). (See the commentaries including Ramban and Abarbanel (ad loc.) as to the need for an additional bris at that point.) In the days of Mordechai and Esther, our Sages teach us that the Jews then reaffirmed their commitment to the bris. On the verse "kiyemu vekibelu hayehudim" (Esther 9:27), Rava states (Shabbos 88a): "they reaccepted [the Torah] in the days of Achashveirosh; they reaffirmed that which they had already accepted." Mori v"Rabi Rav Hershel Schachter shlita quoted a Geonic version of the Gemara (Pesachim 68b) that the meal on Purim celebrates this renewed kabbalas haTorah. In the days of Ezra and Nechemia, the Jewish people, after separating from their gentile wives and non-Jewish children and committing to full observance of Shabbos, committed to and even signed the "bris amana - the covenant of loyalty" (Nechemia 9,10). So too in the period of the final redemption, in the era of Messianic perfection, Hashem promises to form a new covenant, a "bris chadasha", with the Jewish people, reaffirming for all eternity the covenant of Sinai which will never again be abrogated (Yirmiyahu 31:30-33).

Ezra HaSofer ordained that the two tochaichos of Bechukosai and Ki Savo be read before Shavuos and Rosh HaShana, respectively (Megilla 31b). On a simple plane, they warn us of the dire consequences of abandoning the source of life itself, the Torah and its mitzvos, before the day of the giving of the Torah and before the day of Judgment, respectively. But this takkana also highlights the historical entry into a bris with HaKadosh Baruch Hu and the need to renew our commitment to that covenant. Rav Y. D. Solovetichik zt"l (Yemei Zikaron) highlighted the emphasis on bris in the musaf prayer of Rosh HaShana. Almost all the pesukim quoted in the blessing of zichronos refer to bris, and the blessing ends with the phrase "zocher habris". Shavuos, the day of both Matan Torah and Kabbalas HaTorah stresses this same theme.

The concept of tochaicha, intertwined with the bris of Sinai, brings to mind frightening images of Divine wrath and punishment, exile and suffering, unmentionable tragedy and pain. The custom is to read this portion in a low voice indicating our fervent wish not to have to undergo its prophecy of doom. But the giving of the Torah on Shavuos is midrashically compared to a marriage between HaKadosh Baruch Hu, the chassan, and Knesses Yisrael, the kalla (see Ta"anis 4:8, Rashi to Shemos 34:1). Many of the customs of a Jewish wedding are derived from Har Sinai: the chuppaparallel to the mountain over us, marching down to the chuppa with fire reminiscent of the lightning of Sinai, and the giving of a ring parallel to the giving of the luchos. Maharsha (Kesuvos 7b) even writes that the ending of the blessing of eirusin, "m"kadeish amo Yisrael al yedei chuppa vekiddushin" can be translated as "Hashem married the Jewish people through chuppa and kiddushin" (the luchos and Har Sinai)! How can the imagery of the happiness of a marriage be reconciled with the fright of tochaicha.

A fundamental insight I heard from Rav Michael Rosensweig shlita[1] can perhaps resolve this seeming contradiction. Non-Jewish marriage (from a Jewish law perspective) is a "common-law" marriage. A couple decides to live together as husband and wife. Divorce is accomplished by either spouse initiating a separation. (See Rambam, Ishus 1:2, Melachim 9:8.) Jewish marriage, by contrast, is based upon kinyan: "Ha"Isha nikneis bishlosha d"rachim - a woman enters into the marriage kinyan via one of three methods" (Kiddushin 1:1). In the language of Rambam (Ishus ibid.) "once the Torah was given, Israel was commanded that if a man wishes to marry a woman, he should first be koneh her in the presence of witnesses and only then will she be his wife..." This concept of kinyan in marriage has often been misunderstood. Any seasoned student of the Talmud immediately recognizes that a woman is not "acquired" by her husband as property. What then is the "kinyan" of marriage?[2] A Jewish marriage is characterized by the commitment that marriage entails. Unlike non-Jewish marriage which is formed without kinyan, or without commitment, which can be broken at will, Jewish marriage requires this commitment and is not so easily broken. The fact that the punishment for adultery is so severe is indicative of how intense the bond between husband and wife really is. This, in turn, is reflective on a microcosmic level of the macrocosmic "marriage" between HaKadosh Baruch Hu and the Jewish people. It is premised upon mutual commitment and not flippant, ephemeral, spur of the moment will or desire alone. The disastrous consequences predicted by the Torah for abandoning its precepts are reflective of how serious and everlasting this fundamentally loving relationship is. Ramban earlier carefully states that even after the cheit ha"Eigel "ke"ilu nisbatela habris - it was as if the covenant had been nullified"; in reality, it was never nullified as it is eternal. This is why, explains Ramban, no korbanos or sprinking of the dam bris on the nation was necessary for the second bris since it was merely a reaffirmation of the first. I heard from Rav Schachter shlita in the name of Rav Nachman miBreslov that one meaning of the breaking of a glass under the chuppa is to represent the breaking of the luchos rishonos; even after they were broken, the covenant continued with the luchos sheniyos!

The urgency of Torah and mitzvos as reflected by the tochaicha is indicative of the intense, eternal connection of the Creator of the World and his beloved nation. The eternal bris and its fundamental nature is expressed so poignantly by Yirmiyahu (33:25) "im lo brisi yomam valayla, chukos shamayim va"aretz lo samti - if not for my eternal covenant, I would not have formed the laws of heaven and earth!" Chazal explain this bris to be alternatively Torah (Pesachim 68b) or Avoda (Megilla 31b). The upcoming holiday of Shavuos highlights the first. The celebration of Yom Yerushalayim before Shavuos commemorates, in a sense, the second meaning of bris. Not only do we celebrate the great miraculous salvation Hashem orchestrated for his people during and after the Six-Day War but the reconquest of the ancient Yerushalayim and the Har HaBayis which, G-d willing, will be the first step in the

eventual road to the re-establishment of the Beis HaMikdash and the service of Hashem there bimheira beyameinu!

[1] Introductory shiurim to Kiddushin and Kesuvos on yutorah.org. The presentation is as I understood his words. Any error in formulation is my own.

[2] Much has been written as to its precise nature in Rishonim and Acharonim. Here, we focus on its hashkafic implications as I understood from Rav Rosensweig"s shlita shiurim.

Bar Ilan University: Dvar Torah

Society's Attitude to Financial Downfall
By Elishai Ben-Yitzhak[1]

A fundamental concept is that a person's possessions comprise part of his personality and are even likely to give meaning to his life.[2] Feeling stability in one's possessions, insofar as they are part of one's personality, is essential to the course of normal life and to a sense of security[3] and freedom.[4]

The problem is that the vicissitudes of life can deal a blow to a person's economic well-being. Financial downfall can begin due to the failure of an economic venture,[5] or due to losing one's job—things that can make someone no longer able to meet all his financial obligations. From there, it is but a short road to falling into debt. In such a case, the ruined life of the individual calls for rehabilitation; but it is doubtful that rehabilitation is even possible, since a person's property is part of his personality, and the right to property is a fundamental human right.[6] This raises the question as to the proper way of treating a person who has lost his property and become poor.[7] Should such a person be left to cope on his own, or should he be helped? And if helped, to what extent should assistance be proffered? According to what criteria?

These questions, often of concern to Israeli society, are discussed in the weekly reading. *Parashat Be-Har* deals essentially with basic social issues and seeks a remedy for ills and economic misfortunes. According to the plain sense of the text,[8] this week's reading describes the slippery slope of economic downfall[9] in four stages: the first stage is when a person sells his source of livelihood—his field—because his business is no longer bringing in a profit and perhaps is even causing losses; the second stage is when the person sells his house because the revenue from selling his business does not suffice to cover all his debts; in the third stage, the person sells himself into bondage to a Jewish master; and in the last stage, he sells himself as a slave to a gentile master, on the assumption that he will be paid more for his work there, or because his creditors are pressing him to pay up and he cannot wait for a Hebrew master to purchase him as his servant.

In the midst of the description of these stages we come across an injunction which seems not related and is addressed to a third party, to the surrounding society that witnesses the process of financial decline: If your kinsman, coming into straits, comes under your authority, and you hold him as though a resident alien, let him live by your side: do not exact from him advance or accrued interest, but fear your G-d. Let him live by your side as your kinsman. (Lev. 25:35-36)

This directive, addressed to those who witness the economic decline of such a person, is intended to teach us at what point in time we must become involved and how, as a society, we are to stop the downhill slide at an early stage, before the poor person sells himself into slavery. To this end the Torah forbids taking advantage of the hardship of the person who has collapsed financially, and therefore lending money for interest is forbidden. Moreover, we are obliged to give such a person support, but to what extent? Until the point at which we relate to him as if he were our own flesh and blood; as if not the other had suffered a downfall, but we ourselves had collapsed financially: "If your kinsman, coming into straits…let him live by your side"—we must view the other as if he were our kinsman, our own flesh and blood.

Scripture mentions our mutual responsibility in other places, too. For example, in the following demand: If, however, there is a needy person among you, one of your kinsmen in any of your settlements in the land that the Lord your Gd is giving you, do not harden your heart and shut your hand against your needy kinsman. Rather, you must open your hand and lend him sufficient for whatever he needs. (Deut. 15:7-8)

In this connection, Rashi has a fascinating explanation of the expression "your needy kinsman." He says, "If you do not give to him, ultimately you will be brother to the needy." In other words, closing one's eyes, being indifferent and ignoring one's fellow in time of economic crisis can lead to the one who observes from the side ultimately becoming poor himself. In this spirit the Torah commands us to practice remission of debts and loans that have not been paid up by the end of the sabbatical year (Deut. 15:1-2).

The question, as we said, is to what extent we must help out the person who has collapsed financially. This is answered in the Talmud (*Ketubbot* 67b), in the story of one Mar `Ukba, who had a poor man in his neighborhood to whom he regularly sent four hundred *zuz* on the eve of every Day of Atonement. Once he sent his son to deliver the money to the poor man, and a while later the son returned with the money in his hand, claiming that the poor man did not need the money since he had seen old wine being sprayed before the man in order to give his house fragrance. This was a luxury, Mar `Ukba's son thought, and rightly so, for if a person can waste old wine using it for

---

[1] For example, "Three things increase a man's self-esteem: a beautiful dwelling, a beautiful wife, and beautiful clothes" (*Berakhao* 57b).

[2] See the ruling by Judge Edmond Levy, Supreme Court 05/1661, *Hof Gaza Regional Council and Others v. Israeli Knesset and Others*, Nevo website, par. 30.

[3] For a discussion of whether or not a person is entitled to take economic risks cf. *Resp. Nod`a bi-Yehudah*, Tanina edition, *Yore De`ah*, par. 10; *Resp. Iggerot Moshe*, *Hoshen Misphat*, par. 144; *Resp. Tzitz Eliezer* 9.17.

[4] Rav Kook writes: "The very presence of wealth gives self-esteem and tranquility, which enables a person to deal with ideas, the Torah, wisdom, and all good things" (*Ein Ayah*, *Shabbat*, ch. 2, par. 70).

[5] For a discussion of how the *Halakhah* defines a poor person, see Aviad ha-Cohen, "*Kav ha-`Oni ve-Zekhut ha-Kiyyum be-Khavod*," *Parashat ha-Shavua*, Ministry of Justice, 159 (*Tetzaveh*, 2004); Avraham Tenenbaum, "*Le-Hagdarat ha-`Oni*," *Parashat ha-Shavua*, Ministry of Justice, 295 (*Re'eh* 2007); Ido Rekhnitz, "*Medidat `Oni be-Hashra'ah Yehudit*," *Tehumin* 27 (2007), pp. 371-378.

[6] *Or ha-Hayyim* interprets this passage figuratively. He holds that the text here deals not with a private individual, but with the entire community of Israel, as a parable showing the stages of decline that ensued with the loss of spiritual public property (destruction of the Temple) and loss of physical belongings (exile). Afterwards, according to him, the text details the road to correction and redemption, which will occur by virtue of the righteous of the times who, in their death, atone for the people. There are two possibilities for redemption: the one, will occur "in due time"—as reflected in the text, "what he sold shall remain until the jubilee"; the other, "[the Lord] will speed it"—since, "if he prospers," a person may buy the land that he was forced to sell before the jubilee.

[7] The Mishnah, Tractate *Avot* (6.8), says that "Wealth is becoming to the righteous and becoming to the world." Two main approaches can be identified regarding whether it is permissible to be wealthy and accrue possessions: according to Maimonides, a person should follow the middle road in life, "he should not labor in his business except to gain what he needs for immediate use" (*Hilkhot De`ot* 1.4). *Maggid Mishneh*, a commentary on Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah*, explains: "Every intelligent person ought to make do with what is essential and not seek luxuries, and his soul should be more important to him than his possessions" (*Hilkhot Zekhiyah u-Matanah* 12.17). On the other side is the Vilna Gaon, who writes in his commentary on Proverbs 2:16: "Being desirous of a good living and wealth is in no way forbidden"; and Rav Kook tells us: "Every person may engage in wheeling and dealing, and purchase property and possessions even beyond that which is essential for his needs, and he does not thereby neglect the Torah" (*Ein Ayah*, *Berakhot*, ch. 1, par. 30).

[8] *Shulhan Arukh*, *Yoreh De`ah*, *Hilkhot Tzedakah* 250.1.

[9] For an extensive discussion, see Ido Rekhnitz, "*Mahashavot be-`Inyan Hashkafatah ha-Kalkalit-Hevratit shel ha-Yahadut*," *Zohar* 21 (2005), pp. 143-152; Michael Wygoda, "*Bein Zekhuyot Hevratiyot le-Hovot Hevratiyot ba-Mishpat ha-Ivri*," in *Zekhuyot Kalkaliyot, Hevratiyo ve-Tarbutiyot be-Yisrael* (ed. Y. Rabin and Y. Shani), Tel Aviv 2005, pp. 233-296; Naphtali Bar-Ilan, "*Zaka'uto shel he-`Ani le-Tzedakah*," *Tehumin* 2 (1981), pp. 459-465.

fragrance, apparently he does not lack and has no need of charity. However the father, in contrast to his son, thought that if such were the poor man's needs, then the amount of charity given him should actually be **increased** to be sure to supply "his needs."

Accordingly, he sent his son to deliver twice the sum. A similar story is told of Hillel, who bought a poor member of an aristocratic family a horse to ride and a slave to run before him (*Ketubbot* 67b). These instances provide the basis for the *halakhah* that support is given not only to satisfy the most basic needs, but should be given in line with the life-style to which the poor person had been accustomed before he became impoverished: "to cover whatever needs he feels lacking."[1]

This should be a guiding light for us in our day, as well. A distinction should be made between charity given by a private person and charity given from public funds.[2] For the most part, public funds do not suffice to provide a person everything that he lacks in comparison to how he lived before his economic downfall. This is where social responsibility is placed on the circle of people surrounding him to try and assist him in getting through his difficult times. In this instance, the responsibility should fall on people close to him and associates; all those who prior to his economic collapse benefited from his prosperity and themselves derived a livelihood from his wealth. The responsibility rests on them to support the impoverished man in his misfortune, until he can once more stand on his feet. *Translated by Rachel Rowen*

---

[1] For a discussion of questions of social responsibility, see Yonatan Zacks, *Le-Rappe Olam Shavur—Ha-Hayyim ke-Kri'ah le-Aharayut*, Jerusalem 2010, pp. 3-19, 39-54.

[2] Maimonides lists eight levels of charity. The most elevated mode of charity is to give the poor person the opportunity to begin a new page and rehabilitate himself by giving him a loan or the tools to earn a living and succeed in his undertakings (see *Hilkhot Matanot Aniyyim*, 10.7-14).

BS"D

To: parsha@groups.io
From: cshulman@gmail.com

INTERNET PARSHA SHEET
ON **BEHAR - BECHUKOSAI** - 5780

parsha@groups.io / www.parsha.net - in our 25th year! To receive this parsha sheet, go to http://www.parsha.net and click Subscribe or send a blank e-mail to parsha+subscribe@groups.io Please also copy me at cshulman@gmail.com A complete archive of previous issues is now available at http://www.parsha.net It is also fully searchable.

Sponsored in memory of
Chaim Yissachar z"l ben Yechiel Zaydel Dov

Dedicated for a refuah shleimah to **Yisrael Yaakov ben Rut**

To sponsor a parsha sheet contact cshulman@parsha.net
(proceeds to tzedaka)

---

from: Rabbi Yissocher Frand <ryfrand@torah.org>
to: ravfrand@torah.org
date: May 14, 2020, 11:26 PM
subject: Rav Frand - Yovel Is About Going Back to the Source
Dedicated to the speedy recovery of Mordechai ben Chaya
Parshas Behar
Yovel Is About Going Back to the Source
These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: #1118 /#1119 — What Are You (Not) Allowed to Talk About on Shabbos? / Davening in a Rented Movie Theater – Is There A Problem? Good Shabbos!

Yovel Is About Going Back to the Source
In Parshas Behar, following the laws of the Sabbatical year, the Torah says, "You shall count for yourself seven Sabbaths of years, seven years seven times; and the days of the seven Sabbaths of years shall be for you forty-nine years." [Vayikra 25:8] This introduces the laws of the Jubilee (Yovel) year, which are associated with the laws of the Sabbatical (Shmitah) years. Following seven cycles of seven years – on the fiftieth year – a very interesting thing happens. If someone sells his family plot in the Land of Israel, the purchaser is only entitled to keep it until the Yovel year. At Yovel, all family-inherited property returns to the original family who had owned it prior to the sale. Furthermore, even a Hebrew slave who was indentured past his original six-year servitude – which the Torah calls "and he is a slave 'forever' (l'olam)" – goes free on the Yovel year.
The pasuk then says, "You shall sound a broken blast on the shofar, in the seventh month, on the tenth of the month; on Yom Kippur you shall sound the shofar throughout your land." [Vayikra 25:9]. The Yovel year is announced with the blowing of the shofar. Even though, strictly speaking, the year begins on Tishrei 1 (Rosh HaShannah), regarding Yovel, the Yovel laws take effect on Yom Kippur of the fiftieth year.
Now we all know that the tenth day of the month of Tishrei is Yom Kippur. Nevertheless, the previously-cited pasuk redundantly identifies the start of the Yovel year both by saying "in the seventh month, on the tenth of the month" and by saying "on Yom Kippur." Rashi on that pasuk questions this redundancy. Rashi answers that this teaches that the blowing of the Shofar for Yovel overrides any associated prohibition of Shabbos or Yom Kippur.
The Maharal, however, asks a very interesting question. If someone listens carefully to the words of the pasuk, the first identifier mentioned is "the seventh month, on the tenth of the month." Only subsequently does it add "on Yom Kippur." Now, let us ask – which of the two identifiers are extra? It would seem that "Yom Kippur," which is the second mentioned identifier is the extra one. Yet, this is not how Rashi articulates his question. Rashi says "From the fact that the pasuk mentions Yom Kippur, do I not understand that we are speaking of the tenth day of the seventh month?" It should be the other way around! The Maharal asks that Rashi should have phrased the question in the reverse – "From the fact that the pasuk states the tenth day of the seventh month, do I not know that this is Yom Kippur?"
Maharal gives two answers. We will only concentrate on the Maharal's second answer, in which he says a beautiful thought.
The Maharal says it is no coincidence that Yovel is related to Yom Kippur. Yovel is not triggered by Rosh HaShannah of the fiftieth year, or Succos of the fiftieth year, or Pesach of the fiftieth year. It is specifically Yom Kippur of the fiftieth year. The Maharal says there is something interrelated between Yom Kippur and Yovel. The connection is thematic. Yovel is all about going back to the source. Things return to the original configuration that they are supposed to be in. The slave who sold himself beyond the specified six-year term, goes free. He goes back to his family. He goes back to where he belongs. The field that was in someone's family for generations but had to be sold out of desperation because of poverty – now that field comes back to where it belongs.
"Everyone who understands the depths of the matter realizes that Yom Kippur and Yovel teach one and the same lesson. Yovel marks the return of everything to its original status. And so too, on Yom Kippur, everyone returns to his original status (of presumed innocence)."
Yes, we may have strayed during the course of the year. We all stray. But Yom Kippur, we go back to the Source. We go back to the Ribono shel Olam. We go back to our pristine relationship with Him. That is why Rashi emphasizes the primary role of Yom Kippur in setting the date of Yovel: "From the fact that it mentions Yom Kippur, would I not realize that we are speaking about the tenth of the seventh month?" Even though it might be mentioned second in the pasuk, it needs to be treated as the primary factor in the setting of the Yovel year because Yovel and Yom Kippur are two sides of the same coin.
You May Treat Your Worker Like a Slave – But Not Your Eved Ivri
The pasuk in Parshas Behar states, "If your brother becomes impoverished with you and is sold to you, you shall not work him with slave labor." [Vayikra 25:39]. If a person falls on hard times and must sell himself as a slave – a halachic status known as Eved Ivri (Hebrew Slave), the owner is prohibited from having him work "the labor of a slave" (avodas eved). Rashi defines the term avodas eved as demeaning labor. This means, that although this person is indeed your slave—he is not salaried, he works for you day and night for six years—nevertheless you are not allowed to ask him to do "demeaning work".
What is the definition of "demeaning work"? Rashi explains this is work which makes it apparent that he is a slave. For example, a person may not ask the slave to carry his towel and laundry into the public bath house. A person is also not allowed to demand of him "Tie my shoes!" (I am too lazy to bend down and do it myself.) Those are two examples of avodas eved, which we are prohibited to ask a Hebrew slave to do.
The Sifra here comments: These laws apply to one's "Hebrew slave", but if someone has a hired worker who is not an eved ivri – an employee who is paid by the hour or paid a salary – he may ask him to do even the most menial of jobs. He can be ordered to shine your shoes, to lace them, to carry your towel and laundry to the bath house – anything!
There is an irony here – the slave is given better treatment by halacha than

the free man! An eved ivri has more rights and privileges than a ben chorin (free man). That is strange! The free man is also a Jew. Just because he is working for a living, we can ask him to scrub the garbage cans?? Seems strange, but this is the halacha.

There is a second observation from Parshas Bechukosai. Among the curses in Parshas Bechukosai is: "Then I too will do this to you; I will assign over you panic, and the wasting away (shachefes), and the fever (kadachas), causing eyes to pine (mechalos einayim) and souls to feel anguish (medivas nefesh); you will sow your seed in vain, and your enemies will eat it." [Vayikra 26:16]. This is a terrible enumeration of illnesses that will befall us, if we become deserving of the curses mentioned in this parsha. Rashi explains that these plagues – shachefes, kadachas, mechalos einayim, u'medeevos nefesh – represent stages of decline that get progressively worse.

Rashi spells this out: Shachefes (wasting away) is an illness that wears away the flesh. The person is like someone who has been swollen, whose swelling has eased, and whose countenances appears sullen due to the sagging of his flesh. Kadachas (fever) is worse. A person can be sick even to the extent of having Shachefes, but he does not yet have fever. He is not burning up. So, the Torah indicates that the condition will deteriorate until he has fever as well. Then you can have someone who is burning up with fever but he has hopes that he will recover. Therefore, the Torah specifies the next level: mecahlos einayim – I give up on myself. Rashi then goes on to say that the final curse, the lowest level, the worst of the worst is yet to come. Until now, the sick person may feel he has no hope, but others yet hold out hope for his recovery. He may have given up on himself, but his friends and family still encourage him: "You're going to make it!" The final level of descent into hopelessness is medivas nefesh – when the people around you also give up hope!

Let us ask, however, why is that so terrible? Why is it that when your friends are already talking about you in shul – "Aach! There is no hope!" — that seems to be the lowest of the low?

I heard a beautiful talk from the Tolner Rebbe, shlit"a, explaining both these observation of Rashi: Why the Hebrew Slave has to be treated better than the free man, and why it is that people around a sick person giving up hope due to his dire medical condition represents rock bottom hopelessness. The Tolner Rebbe lays out a foundational idea in parenting, in teaching, and in all interpersonal relationships.

The Mishna [Yoma 18a] discusses the Yom Kippur Service of the Kohen Gadol. On the night of Yom Kippur, the Kohen Gadol reviews the morrow's order of the service. The senior members of the Beis Din, the Elders, are assigned go over the Yom Kippur ritual with the Kohen Gadol. They then tell him: Read this over yourself, perhaps you forgot some detail or perhaps you never learned it.

The Talmud asks: I understand that they can suggest "maybe you forgot," after all, anyone can forget something. But what is the meaning of "Perhaps you never learned it?" Would we appoint someone to be Kohen Gadol if he never learned the proper service of the Day of Atonement? What on earth is he doing in the robes of a High Priest if he never learned the order of the Divine Service for Yom Kippur?

Rav Yosef in the Gemara there answers that we are speaking of the Second Temple era. During the first Bais Hamikdash, the individuals appointed to the position of Kohen Gadol were indeed knowledgeable and righteous. In the time of the second Bais Hamikdash, however, there were cases where the office was a political appointment, which sometimes went to the highest bidder. How could there be a Kohen Gadol who never learned Parshas Achrei Mos (which details the laws of the Yom Kippur Temple Service)? It is someone who bought the job, without having deserved it!

Rav Assi gives an example thereof. There was a wealthy woman named Marta, daughter of Beisus, who brought a large quantity of gold dinarim to King Yannai as a bribe, so that the king would appoint Yehoshua ben Gamla to be the Kohen Gadol. There you have it. That is how you can get a Kohen Gadol who is an ignoramus.

Does the name Yehoshua ben Gamla ring any bells? The Gemara says [Bava Basra 21a] that if it would not have been for Yehoshua ben Gamla, Torah would have been forgotten in Israel! The Gemara praises him extensively. Prior to his time, Torah was transmitted in Israel strictly on a father to son basis. If a person did not have a father, he did not learn Torah. Yehoshua ben Gamla enacted that in every town, there had to be schools and teachers. This way, anyone whose home situation was such that he could not learn from his father, he would learn Torah in school. Eventually, every son was brought to school at age five or six and taught Torah. Universal education was established for Jewish boys throughout Eretz Yisrael through the initiative of this Yehoshua ben Gamla.

Tosfos Yeshanim in Tractate Yoma and the Ritva raise this contradiction: From the Gemara in Yoma, it sounds like Yehoshua ben Gamla was an ignorant man (he acquired the High Priesthood by having someone purchase it for him) while the Gemara in Bava Basra lists him as one of the great men of Israel for having implemented universal education! "Had it not been for him, Torah would have been forgotten from Israel." They each suggest answers to this question.

The Sefas Emes gives an interesting answer, different from those proposed by the earlier commentaries. Sefas Emes on Tractate Yoma writes as follows: The Gemara [Yoma 18a] derives from the pasuk "The Kohen who is greater than his brethren…" [Vayikra 21:10] "You should make him greater (i.e. – "richer") (by giving him wealth) from his brethren." The Sefas Emes says that "make him greater from his brethren" does not mean only giving him financial wealth. It means that his fellow Kohanim should pray for him that he should in fact become spiritually greater than them, a person possessing true leadership qualities. The other Kohanim are commanded to treat the High Priest like a Kohen Gadol regardless of how he came into office. They prayed that he should in fact be the Kohen Gadol. They asked him shaylos (Halachic questions) as if he was the Kohen Gadol.

What was the result of all this treatment by his fellow Kohanim? He in fact became the Kohen Gadol! He became a great person because of the confidence and faith that others invested in him. He had a metamorphosis. He went from being an am ha'aretz (ignoramus) to being Rabbi Yehoshua ben Gamla, by virtue of the fact that they believed in him and they treated him like a Kohen Gadol.

This tells us that what others say about us, how others feel towards us, others believing in us—has a tremendous impact. With the right treatment, there is no limit to what we can achieve. This answers why the worst of the worst illnesses is not the shachefes, the kadachas; or the mechalos einayim. The worst of the worst is when people around him say "He is a goner." If they already believe that the patient has a foot in the grave, then that has an impact on him as well. Everybody knows that how a sick person feels about himself can have a profound influence on whether he will get better or not. This is saying, however, that what others feel about the patient can also have major impact on his prognosis.

Now we can understand that first Rashi as well. Rashi says not to treat the eved ivri like a slave. Rashi defines this as "making him look like he is a slave." If you want to have him tie your shoes or shine them in the privacy of your own home – that is all well and good. But when you go out in public and this fellow is carrying your gym bag and everyone knows he is an eved, then everyone will look at him like an eved and treat him like an eved. He will then feel like an eved. "I am an eved!"

A Ben Chorin has no such problems of self-esteem. "Listen, I am getting paid for this. This is my job and I get good money for it. I have that sense of confidence. It does not bother me so much what people will say." But someone who is a slave and it is clear that he is a slave and he is treated like a slave – that is too much for a person to take. The Torah therefore commands: "Do not make him do menial labor like a slave." [Vayikra 25:39].

The Tolner Rebbe says: When Klal Yisrael left Mitzraim, "Both these (the Jews) and these (the Egyptians) worshipped idols." Klal Yisrael were in the depths of impurity. They sank to the 49th of the 50 levels of Tumah. Even at

the Splitting of the Sea – a week after the Exodus – still "both these and these worshipped idols." How could the Ribono shel Olam give them the Torah a mere six weeks later?

Think about it. A fellow becomes a Baal Teshuva. He makes a life-changing decision that he wants to become an observant Jew and learn Torah. What are you going to do? Do you take out Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim, Chapter One, Paragraph One and go through the entire Code of Jewish Law with him all the way to the last paragraph of Choshen Mishpat? "I am going to tell you about Shatnez; I am going to tell you about Chadash and Yashan; I am going to tell you about worms in fish; I am going to tell you about everything under the sun!" You cannot do that to a new Baal Teshuva!

And yet, Klal Yisrael went from the level of "they are idolaters" (Trust me, no Baal Teshuva today is on as low a spiritual level as the Jews were in Egypt) to the Revelation at Sinai. The Revelation at Sinai involved all 613 Mitzvos! How could the Almighty do that to them?

The reason He could do it was because He told Moshe Rabbeinu before He gave him the Torah, tell them that "You will be for Me a Kingdom of Priests and a Holy Nation! These are the words that you shall speak to the Children of Israel" [Shemos 19:6]. "Tell them in My Name" said the Almighty, "YOU ARE A KINGDOM OF PRIESTS AND A HOLY NATION!" This is a title that the Ribono shel Olam gave to no other people.

If the Ribono shel Olam has that confidence in us, then fine – we are prepared to hear all 613 mitzvos. He believed in them.

That is what I mean when I say this is a lesson not only for the Kohen Gadol and for the eved. It is a lesson for all of us – how we treat our children; how we look at our children; the confidence that we have in our children; or the lack thereof. That can make a profound difference in how they turn out.

The Master of the Universe tells us "You will be for Me a Kingdom of Priests and a Holy Nation!" This is the preface for receiving the Torah.

Transcribed by David Twersky; Jerusalem DavidATwersky@gmail.com
Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman; Baltimore, MD dhoffman@torah.org

This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. A listing of the halachic portions for Parshas Behar is provided below: A complete catalogue can be ordered from the Yad Yechiel Institute, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD 21117-0511. Call (410) 358-0416 or e-mail tapes@yadyechiel.org or visit http://www.yadyechiel.org/ for further information.

---

fw from hamelaket@gmail.com
from: Rabbi Sacks <info@rabbisacks.org>
subject: Covenant and Conversation

The Power of a Curse (Behar-Bechukotai 5780)
Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

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.

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.
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.
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.
Shabbat Shalom

---

fw from hamelaket@gmail.com
from: Rabbi Chanan Morrison <chanan@ravkooktorah.org>
to: rav-kook-list@googlegroups.com
subject: [Rav Kook Torah]
National Redemption and Private Protection
Rav Kook Torah
Before reciting the evening Amidah, we say the הַשְׁכִּיבֵנוּ prayer, asking God to watch over us in times of trouble:
"Save us for Your name's sake.
Shield us and remove from us every enemy, plague, sword, famine, and sorrow.
Remove the adversary from before and behind us.
Shelter us in the shadow of Your wings...
Guard our going out and coming in; grant us life and peace, now and always."
A beautiful, powerful prayer. But its location in the evening prayers is puzzling. We know that the Sages praised one who recites the Amidah prayer immediately after Birkat Ge'ulah (גאל ישראל), after thanking God for delivering us from Egyptian slavery. This prayer structure is called semichat ge'ulah le-tefillah.
So why is הַשְׁכִּיבֵנוּ stuck in the middle, sandwiched between Birkat Ge'ulah and the Amidah?
Expanded Redemption
The Talmud explains that הַשְׁכִּיבֵנוּ is a continuation of the blessing of redemption. They referred to this as ge'ulah arichta, "extended redemption." Or perhaps: "expanded redemption." We need to understand the connection between these two blessings.
An ancient tradition1 relates that הַשְׁכִּיבֵנוּ was first recited on the night of Israel's redemption from Egypt. The Hebrew slaves feared the terrible plague killing the firstborn might also strike unworthy individuals among the Jewish people. On that terrifying night, they fervently prayed that they would be protected from every plague, sword, famine, and sorrow - the הַשְׁכִּיבֵנוּ prayer.
If so, both blessings are rooted in the Divine redemption in Egypt. The principal blessing, Birkat Ge'ulah, speaks of our collective deliverance from slavery and oppression. The shorter blessing, הַשְׁכִּיבֵנוּ, is a personal prayer beseeching God's protection. First recited in Egypt, this private prayer extends the redemption we experienced as a nation in Egypt to all times of need. Together, these blessings comprise ge'ulah arichta.
For Rav Kook, this is a winning combination. Even when we have personal challenges and troubles, we should not ignore the needs of the collective. We still recognize the need to redeem the nation and all of humanity - Birkat Ge'ulah. The Sages stressed that we should bind together Israel's redemption - a milestone in humanity's advance from idolatry and superstition - to our Amidah prayer.
Yet, even as we set our sights on making the world a better place, we may not disregard our personal needs. Even those working for the benefit of the community recite הַשְׁכִּיבֵנוּ, praying for their own physical safety and spiritual welfare.

---

fw from hamelaket@gmail.com
from: Rabbi Yochanan Zweig <genesis@torah.org>
to: rabbizweig@torah.org
subject: Rabbi Zweig
Insights Parshas Behar-Bechukosai Iyar 5780
Yeshiva Beis Moshe Chaim / Talmudic University
Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig
This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Chana Necha bas Yaakov. "May her Neshama have an Aliya!"
Brotherly Love
If your brother becomes impoverished and his hand falters in your proximity, you shall hold on to him... (25:35)
A puzzling Midrash Tanchuma discusses the concept of having the responsibility to help a poor person. The Midrash states that if we don't help a poor person now, the following year he will need a lot more help (very similar to what Rashi comments on our possuk; see Rashi ad loc). The Midrash ends by saying that if we neglect to fulfill our responsibility to help we are actually robbing the poor.
This Midrash statement requires clarification: Why is it that if we don't help a poor person he will need exponentially more help later? Perhaps we can reasonably assume that he will need twice as much help (last year's shortfall and this year's shortfall), yet Rashi says that not helping immediately will cause the future need to be more than five times the present need. How can this be true?
Additionally, how is not giving charity equal to stealing from the poor? It seems very difficult to equate not giving charity with stealing when one is a sin of omission and the other is a sin of commission.
We find a remarkable Gemara (Brachos 6b) that discusses an enigmatic admonition from the prophet Yeshaya: "What you have stolen from the poor is in your houses" (Yeshaya 3:14). Rashi (Brachos 6b) explains that the

Gemara wonders why we are singling out stealing from the poor. After all, stealing from the rich is also a terrible sin! Additionally, it doesn't even make sense to expend the effort to steal from the poor; how much can one realistically take? (As the famous bank robber Willie Sutton supposedly answered when asked why he robs banks - "because that's where the money is.")

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

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

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

When we ignore the needs of a poor person we are taking away his self-esteem, and telling him that he isn't worthy of our help. Destroying a person's self-respect will predictably lead to dire consequences. A person with low self-esteem has no interest in improving his situation because he feels inadequate, incapable, and unworthy of better circumstances. This is why if you don't help a poor person the following year it becomes exponentially worse; destroying his self-esteem creates a devastating downward spiral. Therefore, when we give charity, we must make every effort to ensure that the recipient doesn't feel like a charity case; he must feel that it is our honor to be able to help because we believe in him and respect him. If a person knows that he has a backer who believes in him, he will inevitably "pull himself up by the bootstraps" and improve his own situation. The Torah is teaching us that the antidote to poverty is creating a relationship with someone who needs our help. Ultimately, this validation enables them to help themselves.

Jewish American or American Jew

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

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

Yet when the Torah explains why all these terrible consequences will eventually befall the Jewish people, the Torah explicitly, and repeatedly, lays the blame on Bnei Yisroel for not keeping the laws of Shemittah (see 26:34-35 ad 26:43). In fact, Rashi himself goes through the calculation of the years of exile to reconcile it exactly with the amount of Shemittah years Bnei Yisroel didn't keep while in Eretz Yisroel, and states that this inexorably led to the expulsion of Bnei Yisroel from Eretz Yisroel (see Rashi 26:35). So why does Rashi feel compelled to cite the sin of not being immersed in Torah study as the key failing that led to the exile of Bnei Yisroel when it seems to contradict what the Torah outright tells us?

As explained in prior editions of INSIGHTS, the key test in leaving Egypt was whether Bnei Yisroel identified themselves as Jews or as Egyptians. This is why they had to place the blood on the doorways of their houses; to visibly declare that it was a house of proud God fearing Jews. This explains many of the details relating to who left Egypt and who didn't (see INSIGHTS Vol 6, Parshas Bo).

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

Historically, Jewish exile has brought Jews closer to one another and caused them to identify themselves in a distinctly Jewish manner. A prime example of this was the development of a uniquely Jewish language by which to communicate. In European countries there was Yiddish, in the Spanish countries there was Ladino, and in Iran it was a Judaeo-Farsi dialect. In other words, and for a variety of reasons, we chose to culturally identify as Jews. Today, Jews are more comfortable identifying with sports teams. We wear clothes and other memorabilia carrying our "home team" colors and logos. We proudly adorn our children with team jerseys of the local sports' "heroes." Some of us go so far as to obtain significant sports memorabilia and decorate the walls of our homes with it. This odd behavior is unique to the current American (and perhaps western society) exile. Can anyone possibly imagine our great grandparents in Europe wearing a sports jersey of the Polish national team? They would probably look at you cross-eyed and say, "What connection do I have to a couple of crazy goyim kicking a ball down the field like six year olds?"

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

This is what Shemittah was supposed to reinforce. While we don't work the fields or harvest the fruits, we are brought closer as a nation, and a familial feeling is developed. Anybody can walk onto anybody else's field and take whatever he needs, as if it was one of their closest relatives property. Just as I would be comfortable walking into my sister's home and opening the refrigerator to see what she had to eat, so too I can pick my neighbors fruit. Shemittah provides a sense of shared space like one big family.

This is also the reason that Shemittah causes all personal loans to be cancelled. After all, if my brother can't pay me back would I really want to pressure him? Would I ever dream of charging my mother interest on a loan? The fact that Bnei Yisroel didn't keep a single Shemittah means that they were estranged from one another. Naturally, the consequence for this lesson not learned is to be exiled and forced to learn how much we need each other. Unfortunately, only by being thrown to the wolves of the nations of the world, where we are constantly hounded for being who we are, do we learn how badly we need one another as Jews.

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

Talmudic College of Florida
Rohr Talmudic University Campus
4000 Alton Road, Miami Beach, FL 33140

---

from: Parsha@torahinaction.com
date: May 14, 2020, 12:16 PM
subject: Behar - Coronavirus and Shemitta
Rabbi Parkoff's Chizuk Letter
Parshas Behar
Mai Inyan Shemitta to Coronavirus
The Purpose of Corona Virus Shutdown: Hashem Controls the World
(Excerpt from a talk by **Rav Yisroel Brog**)

During this period of the corona virus, people are going crazy. Everybody is stuck at home. Their lives have been changed. And people just don't get it. What they don't get is what Rav Don Segal said. Most people think that I'm stuck at home because of the virus. Otherwise I'd be running around the streets.

You're wrong. The reason that there is a virus is that Hashem wants you stuck at home. You know why you're wearing face masks? Because Hashem wants you to cover your mouth. Hashem wants you cover your nose. Hashem wants you to diminish and minimize yourself. Hashem wants you to realize that you're a nobody. You don't have any control over your own life: where you go, how you go, when you go.

You hear crazy stories about police beating up people who are not wearing face masks. Spraying mace in people's faces. It's all from Hashem. Hashem is telling these goyim, don't you get it? How dumb are you? You're in My world. It's Hashem's world, and Hashem wants the goyim off the street. He wants them in their homes. He doesn't want them in any bars. He doesn't want them in any theaters. He doesn't want them in restaurants and night clubs. He doesn't want them in any sports stadiums. That's why Hashem brought the virus.

Everybody looks at it that because of the virus, everything has to be closed down and I'm stuck. It's just the opposite. Hashem wants us stuck, therefore He brought on the virus. We have to give our will up to Hashem. When a person says "I'm frustrated," you know what that means? "I don't like what Hashem is doing to me. And I don't care what Hashem's will is. I'm very bothered by the fact that I had to have Pesach Seder myself. And all my kids couldn't come, or I couldn't go to my kids." Or a person that is frustrated that he had to be separated from his own wife and his own children to go into quarantine because maybe perhaps he has the virus. Or maybe perhaps it was the opposite, his wife had the virus.

We fight the situation. I understand you. That's what you want. But our problem is that we don't accept the will of Hashem. We find that very difficult.

What's wrong if you turn your house into a Beis Hamidrash? What's wrong if you turn your life around and start thinking about your purpose in this world. What's wrong with developing the attitude that whatever I'm subjected to is the will of Hashem. Everybody's fighting. People out there are fighting it, they're demonstrating in front of the mayor's house, in front of the governor's house. They don't get it. They refuse to recognize that this is what Hashem wants.

* * *

This virus couldn't have come at a better time. This week we're reading about the Seventh Year Shemitta. Shemitta was a time when all commerce in Eretz Yisroel shut down. Sounds familiar?

Shemittah Infuses Emunah And Bitachon

And the Lord spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai, saying, Speak to the children of Israel and you shall say to them: When you come to the land that I am giving you, the land shall rest a Sabbath to the Lord. (Vayikra 25:1-2)

The Kli Yakar explains that the mitzvah of keeping the Shmitta year was to internalize the middah of emuna and bitachon in Hashem in the hearts of Klal Yisroel. Hakadosh Baruch Hu was concerned that when they finally entered the land, they would get involved in developing the land. As they become more engrossed in farming and their efforts bear success, they would come to forget Hashem and eventually lose their bitachon. They would think that their expertise (the Yiddishe Kup) was the source of their accomplishment and that everything is governed by the laws of nature. The land is theirs and they own it. Therefore, Hashem totally removed them from the natural course of action. Normally a farmer plants for 2 years and leaves the land fallow one year in order to not exhaust its fertility. Hakadosh Baruch Hu told them to plant for 6 straight years and promised that it won't lose its productiveness. Secondly, He promised a miracle within a miracle: after 6 straight years of planting not only would the land not deteriorate, but in the sixth year it would become so fertile it would give forth a crop that would last for 3 years. Moreover, in spite of the fact that the crop would be the same amount as a normal crop, but it would be of such a high quality it would be sufficient to last 3 years.

This is hinted at in the possuk: You may sow your field for six years, and for six years you may prune your vineyard, and gather in its produce, (ibid. 3) שֵׁשׁ שָׁנִים תִּזְרַע שָׂדֶךָ וְשֵׁשׁ שָׁנִים תִּזְמֹר כַּרְמֶךָ וְאָסַפְתָּ אֶת תְּבוּאָתָהּ. You will notice that the word "its produce" – תְּבוּאָתָהּ– has a dot in the "heh" inferring to read the word: "its specific produce." This is hinting that "its normal produce" will be eaten for 3 years! The effect of all these miracles will be that Klal Yisroel will know that I am the real owner of the land and this will bring them to lift their eyes on high to trust in Hashem. This was the reason why the mann descended everyday with only one day's portion. In this way they continuously looked to Hashem to provide their daily sustenance and constantly trust in Him.

"If you will say, what will we eat in the seventh year?" I will ordain My blessing for you in the sixth year. (25:20.21)

The great Chassidic Rebbe Elimelech in his sefer "Noam Elimelech" (parshas Behar) cites a commentary from his older brother Rebbe Zusha: In parshas Behar the Torah describes the mitzvah of Shemitta. It says, "And if you shall say, what shall we eat in the seventh year? Behold, we shall not sow, nor gather in our produce. Then I will command My blessing upon you in the sixth year, and it shall bring forth fruit for three years" (Vayikra 25:20-21). This is a very strange statement. Why did Hashem have to wait for Klal Yisroel to ask, "What are we going to eat?" before giving them the bracha? In other places in the Torah He gives the bracha without being asked.

The answer is that when the Ribono Shel Olam created the world, He created the channels to rain down upon the individual a constant bounty of sustenance. As long as Klal Yisroel do not ask the question "What shall we eat?" they are guaranteed the heavenly blessings in limitless bounty merely from the power of their bitachon. They will be able to eat just a little. The food will be so blessed within them that that little bit will satisfy them and they won't need to bother themselves with cutting the crop and harvesting, etc. (See the commentary of the Siforno). However, if they fall in their emuna and become worried and ask, "What are we going to eat?" they have just locked the windows of Heaven and spoiled the storehouses of bounty. HaKadosh Baruch Hu now has to give them a special bracha, "Then I will command My blessing upon you…" HaKadosh Baruch Hu in His great mercy and loving-kindness will shower down a new bracha. But they have bothered the Ribono Shel Olam to create new blessings. They will have to pay the price with hard work in order to get it.

The author of the Toldos Yaakov Yoseph in his sefer Kesones Pasim (parshas Shemini) quotes the Rambam that if we would have perfect bitachon in HaKadosh Baruch Hu we would merit heavenly mann even today! In parshas Mikeitz he cites the Ba'al Shem Tov who comments on the possuk "One who trusts in Hashem is surrounded by chesed" (Tehillim 32:10). If a person has perfect bitachon in Hashem, then angels come to guard him each step of the way. All the evil forces of the world cannot harm him. The sefer Keser Shem Tov by the Ba'al Shem Tov further states that if one really has bitachon in Hashem, then even if he has been condemned to terrible decrees, they have no influence over him. As it states (Tehillim 125:1) "Those who trust in the Lord shall be like Mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but exists for ever."

There is an inspirational mashal, parable, from the Rizhiner Rebbe, which illustrates clearly to the individual who is willing to open his "eyes" and look, how, after all is said and done, it is Hashem Who sustains and provides

for our livelihood. A poor man, who earned his meager living via the time-honored vocation of soliciting charity from whoever would help him, heard of a very wealthy philanthropist who was very generous with his contributions. Indeed, anyone who came to his door left a very happy man. He traveled to the town where this philanthropist lived, but, by mistake, knocked on the door of the town's miser. The poor man requested food. The miser did not identify himself as such and instead said, "I will give you food for work. I need somebody around my house, and I will be happy to reimburse your time." Nu, what could the poor man do? He labored all day. At the end of the day, he asked the man for a meal. The miser had no shame (they never do), and he proceeded to send the poor man next door to the philanthropist. His generous neighbor would provide him with a meal!

This, explains the Rebbe, is the story of earning a livelihood. In the end, we are all sustained by the Almighty. Some of us, regrettably, knock on the wrong door. We turn to various venues which we think will provide for us, but, at the end of the day, it is Hashem Who is supporting us. This is the lesson of Shemittah. It is not about the land. It is about realizing that the land is merely Hashem's vehicle. The support always comes from Above.

The Be'er Mayim Chaim approaches the question from a different perspective. He views the questioner not as one who doubts, but rather, as one who truly believes that Hashem will provide. He is filled with emunah and bitachon. So, why is he questioning? He wonders not if Hashem will provide, but rather, how will He do it? What miracle will Hashem bring forth to sustain him? After all, if there is no agricultural effort, there can be no harvest, and, thus, no food. Hashem replies that He has no need for miracles, and we should not depend on them. The Almighty has sufficient latitude within His control of nature to provide sustenance without going to the next level and sending a miracle. He will bless the sixth year, and it will provide more and better in order to sustain His believers.

Shemittah is more than a lesson in earning a livelihood. It is a primer for life. It is an attitude that a Jew should manifest throughout his life's endeavor.

Gut Shabbos!

---

fw from hamelaket@gmail.com
From tech@nachmankahana.com
http://nachmankahana.com/category/divrei-torah/
Rabbi Nachman Kahana

Rav Kahana Dvar Torah
BS"D Parashat Behar Bechukotai 5780
Rabbi Nachman Kahana
Old is Beautiful

The underlying theme in parashat Behar, according to the Gemara (Kiddushin 20a), is the punishment of the sinner whose life goes from bad to worse but refuses to realize that the cause of his suffering is his continued negative behavior.

Who is there to point out to the sinner the secret of his despair?

Vayikra 19,32:

מפני שיבה תקום והדרת פני זקן ויראת מאלהיך אני ה

Arise in the presence of the aged and admire the elderly and revere your G-d. I am the L-rd.

This term appears often in our sources

יין ישן שדעת זקנים נוחה הימנו

Old wine that provides pleasure for the elderly

Why is the pleasure of old wine associated with the elderly, when there are many young people who enjoy a good glass of old wine?

I suggest:

The elderly are often sidelined to a spectator status after experiencing decades of participation in active life and society. Often depression sets in, with the feeling that their importance has diminished to the extent that they are more a burden to society and family than an asset; their future is behind them. Many are resolved to the feeling that this is the fate of all things old in a world geared to the young, fresh, and new.

The rabbis, in their great wisdom, were revealing an important lesson that is inherent in a glass of old wine. An elderly person sips a glass of old kiddush wine, and it is good and sweet. Suddenly, he realizes that "old" is not necessarily worthless. On the contrary, just as old wine has greater value than freshly produced wine, so too can the elderly perform functions in society which the young are unable to do.

Our Jewish great-grandfathers and great-grandmothers have always been held in high esteem and love for their chachmat chayim (life's wisdom), but much more so in our time. For they perform, effortlessly, what is probably the highest and most eminent function possible. They are the living proof, indeed the only tangible, irrefutable, undeniable proof, for any objective mind, that God exists and that He is a religious Zionist.

The Midrash Tanchuma (parashat Noach) and other sources cite three righteous individuals who saw their former lives destroyed and then rebuilt through HaShem's mercy.

Noach lived in a highly developed society. He saw the world utterly destroyed, and then merited to live after the deluge to experience humanity flourishing once again. Daniel saw the first Temple, its destruction and galut of seventy years, and merited to see the rebuilding of the second Temple. After living the good life, Eyov (Job) experienced the death of all his family, abject poverty and sickness, and then saw his life rebound in all its glory. Today's elderly are living proof and irrefutable testimony that HaShem is the God of Israel and that we are His chosen nation.

Octogenarians of sound mind can tell you what Jewish life was prior to the Second World War. One did not have to be an observant Jew to have been aware of the strength of Torah in Eastern Europe and in most Jewish communities in Moslem lands. The Jewish genius was recognized even by those who hated us for it, and there was a feeling of pride in belonging to the Children of Israel, whose roots went back 3500 years.

Then the heavens fell from their pillars and the Jewish people were engulfed in devastation. When the air cleared in 1945, and we counted our losses, the enormity of the Shoah became unescapably clear. One of every three Jews who were alive on September 1, 1939 was murdered; so that the Jewish people were less than 12 million at the war's end.

Pride turned to shame. The Torah was trampled upon with the destruction of the Torah centers of Europe. The sackcloth replaced the tallit, when it became known that over twelve thousand Jews were murdered daily in the Auschwitz camp alone, not to mention the hundreds of additional slave and death camps the Germans activated all over Europe. And the remnant asked, "Who will and who can resurrect the Jewish spirit to reinforce our belief that we are HaShem's chosen people?"

But the elderly of today join with Noach, Daniel and Eyov in forming a very elite group of Jews who saw the Jewish world brought to its knees, but miraculously spread its wings to gain ever higher levels of Torah and faith in HaShem.

One need not do more than be aware of their presence amongst us, and then realize that the elderly venerable man or woman before you, is living testimony to the living God of Israel.

The miraculous rejuvenation of our nation occurred after the defeat of the German-Amalek with the rebirth of Medinat Yisrael. The greatest proof that the Creator exists, and that the world is determined by His will is the improbable survival and flourishing of the Jewish people, as stated by the prophets.

The younger generation that has not personally witnessed the extreme changes of the last 70-80 years in Jewish history can indulge itself in the false "luxury" of bashing Medinat Yisrael; from the black-garbed Chareidi communities of the galut, some of whom make pilgrimages to the Hitlers of Iran, down to the majority of US Jews under 35 years of age, who reportedly would not feel any great loss if there would not be a Medinat Yisrael!

I suggest that they sit down with the “old folks” and learn from them the wisdom gleaned from personal experience; what it felt like to be a Jew without Medinat Yisrael and what the Medina has contributed to our lives.
Amalek is not a myth. Indeed, he is alive. He is present in Islam and Christianity. He is forever planning, contriving and designing to destroy the Jewish people wherever the Jew might be found: at Ground Zero; in Dearborn, Michigan; in the White House or the U. N., Amalek constitutes an ever-present danger to the Jewish people, regardless of whether the individual Jew is a Torah-observant person or if he is a sworn atheist.
The Medina was restored to Am Yisrael to be, among other things, the Noah’s ark for our people to survive, and then to thrive, as we had not done for over the last 2000 years of galut.
When my mother was ninety, she told me that, inside, she felt the same as when she was 18! So young men and young women, sit down and glean the wisdom of your “old” 18-year-olds. You will go away a better Jew, and a better person.
Learn the secrets of a meaningful life from those who have gone the distance, those elderly who are a “deposit box” of wisdom and experience.
Parashat Be’Chukotai
This parasha is a lesson in crime and punishment. HaShem recalls all, even an inconspicuous blade of grass that grew and dried up in the grasslands of Argentina, and certainly the conduct of an unrepentant sinner.
To remember and not to forget is also a characteristic of the Jewish people. We forever remember our friends and never forget our enemies. It is a command of the Torah to remember the evils of Amalek; but also, to reciprocate to the nations that aided us in our times of strife.
It is a necessary part of Jewish education to learn the history of our people. Who were our ancestors and what did they do to cause the Creator to enter into an eternal covenant with their children whose centerpiece is the holy Torah? What about the wanderings and the return to Eretz Yisrael, where we established the Jewish monarchy, the two Temples and their destruction, followed by our 2000-year exile and return home?
To be aware of our history is to become connected with all our rabbis and kings, saints and soldiers. To forget who we are and from where we came is the “cutting of the ribbon” to the exit door from Judaism.
One small example:
This week I had reason to recall that ten years ago in 2010, our national all-star basketball team trounced the national all-star team of Latvia, winning by 35 points. So what?
At the time when I heard the results on the news, it immediately brought to mind another basketball game in that part of the world. It was held in 1941, between the Lithuanians (who together with Latvia and Estonia comprise the Baltic States) and the occupying German army. Just to refresh your memories, the Baltic peoples are among the most incorrigible anti-Semites that slither on this globe. My mother a”h, who was born in Dvinsk, Latvia at the time when two Torah giants resided there; the “Or Sa’mayach” and the Rogechover Gaon, made a count of 200 of her relatives in Dvinsk and Riga who were murdered by the local Latvians before the Nazi invasion. On the tenth of Tevet, the general Kaddish day, I recite kaddish for the 200 members of my mother’s family and the hundreds more of my father’s family, who were murdered in the region of Galicia, Poland.
Returning to the basketball game of 1941. The prize that was awarded to every member of the winning team was the opportunity to shoot ten Jews! The events surrounding that basketball game were detailed in a 1948 book by Josef Gar, a Lithuanian, describing how the victorious Lithuanian team herded Jewish residents into a tower, where each player took his turn shooting ten Jews.
This was a little “spark” in time. One incident in the innumerable sadistic acts of evil perpetrated against our people: the winning prize in a basketball game was to shoot Jewish people!
We can and must remember the evils done to us and — prepare for the day of heavenly retribution. Is the **coronavirus** that is attacking Europe, Turkey, Iran and many other of our enemies the beginning of the final chapter in the history of anti-Semitism?
When one considers the evils perpetrated upon us over the generations for which the evildoers will be punished in this world or the next, one immediately thinks of Germany, Spain, Poland, Russia, as well as Arabs, Romans, Greeks, etc. But these sadists are only a small part of the larger picture.
The Gemara (Avoda Zara 71b) states that any Gentile who causes tza’ar (pain, hardship, embarrassment, ridicule or any emotional distress) to a Jew has perpetrated a capital crime and will be punished accordingly; either in the halachic court of this world or the heavenly court, a bit later.
This is the most powerful expression of HaShem’s love for the Jewish people!
“Never Forget and Never Forgive. Retribution will be forthcoming”!
Shabbat Shalom,
Nachman Kahana

---

https://www.torahweb.org/torah/2020/parsha/rkoe_behar.html
Rabbi Eliakim Koenigsberg
Overcoming Natural Instincts - The Ultimate Power Struggle
The Torah says (Behar 25:20-21), "If you will ask what shall we eat in the seventh year if we have not planted or gathered our produce, I will direct my blessing to you (i.e. to your land) in the sixth year, and it will provide for the three-year period." The Torah promises those who observe the laws of shemitah that the land will produce double or triple its normal yield in the sixth year, and that will last until they are able to plant and harvest once again. Why are those who observe shemitah rewarded with such an unnatural occurrence?
The Midrash Tanchuma (Vayikra 1:1) comments:
"The strong warriors (giborei ko'ach) who do Hashem's bidding, to obey the voice of His word (Tehillim 103:20)"...Rav Huna explained in the name of Reb Acha: this refers to Klal Yisrael who said na'aseh before nishma (and thus accepted to perform mitzvos before they heard what their obligation entailed). Reb Yitzchak Nafcha said: this refers to those who observe the laws of shemitah. And why are they called strong warriors? A person sees his field and his trees (being treated as if they are) ownerless, the fences are open, his fruits are being eaten, and he controls himself and does not protest. The Sages teach, "Who is a gibor - a strong person? One who controls his natural temperament. (Avos 4:1)"
The middah of gevurah involves controlling one's natural tendencies. One who overcomes feelings of anger or jealousy, or one who resists an improper desire for physical pleasure demonstrates inner strength. Such behavior is so fundamental to one's avodas Hashem that Rav Yosef Karo chose to begin his Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 1:1) by alluding to this very idea. He writes, "One should be strong as a lion to rise up in the morning to serve his Creator" - echoing the statement of Reb Yehuda ben Teima (Avos 5:20) that one should be "strong as a lion to do the will of your Father in heaven." One who fights his natural inclination to continue sleeping is as powerful as a strong lion.
The Avos d'Rebbi Nosson (23:1) adds, "There is no one stronger than giborei Torah - the mighty warriors of Torah." Those who study Torah diligently also demonstrate the middah of gevurah. By sacrificing their time, their sleep, and even their financial well-being, they act against human nature. Similarly, the Gemara (Gittin 36b) says, "Those who are shamed but do not embarrass in return, they are insulted but do not respond...about them the posuk says, 'And those who love Him (Hashem) will be like the sun rising in its full strength.' (Shoftim 5:31)" One who resists his desire for retribution is compared to the strength of a rising sun.
When Klal Yisrael said na'aseh v'nishma they were acting against their natural instincts because most people would refuse to accept an undefined obligation. That is why Klal Yisrael are called giborei ko'ach because their statement was an expression of inner strength. And by the same token, those

who observe shemitah also demonstrate gevurah by submitting their will to the command of the Torah to allow others to enter their fields during the year of shemitah and take fruits for free.
What is the reward for those who overcome their natural tendencies in order to serve Hashem? They are treated to extraordinary blessing. Chazal comment (Midrash Rabba, Vayeishev 87:8), "The sea split in the merit of Yosef's bones - 'The sea saw and fled (Tehillim 114:3)' in the merit of the one about whom it says, 'And he fled and went outside. (Vayeishev 39:12)'" Hashem performed a miracle and split the sea before Klal Yisrael in the merit of Yosef who acted with superhuman strength when he resisted the wife of Potiphar and he ran outside. One who acts against his nature is repaid with supernatural blessing. Similarly, Chazal say, "One who is not so exacting in the way he deals with others will have his sins forgiven. (Yoma 23a)" If someone overlooks a wrong that he has suffered, then Hashem will also overlook that person's wrongdoings. One who rises above his natural instincts when dealing with others is not judged in heaven by the normal rules.
Perhaps this is why those who observe shemitah are blessed with extra produce during the sixth year. By giving free access to their fields they overcome their natural impulse to act as owners. In return, Hashem promises that in the sixth year the fields will produce much more than their normal yield. The unnatural self-control of those who observe shemitah is rewarded with unusual blessing.
This idea - the importance of controlling one's natural impulses - is especially relevant during the period of Sefiras HaOmer. On Pesach we offer the Korban HaOmer which is made of barley, an animal food (see Sotah 14a), while on Shavuos we bring the Shtei HaLechem (two loaves) which are made of wheat, a human food. These korbanos symbolize the inner transformation that the Torah demands of us - to overcome our natural animal instincts for self-satisfaction, and to act instead with restraint and self-control. By observing mitzvos with dedication and discipline, and by interacting with others with humility and self-control, we demonstrate a powerful inner strength, and we make ourselves worthy of extra blessing.
More divrei Torah from Rabbi Koenigsberg
More divrei Torah on Parshas Behar

---

from: Ohr Somayach <ohr@ohr.edu>
to: weekly@ohr.edu
subject: Torah Weekly
Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parshat Behar – Bechukotai
For the week ending 16 May 2020 / 22 Iyyar 5780
Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com
Parsha Insights
Holy Crop Rotation!
"For six years you may sow your field" (25:3)
I still remember learning at school about crop rotation. One year the field would be planted with wheat, the next year with barley or some other crop, and the third it would be left to lie fallow. And then the cycle would begin again.
When reading this week's Torah portion, one could think that the mitzvah of Shemitta, the prohibition of working the fields in the seventh year, is some kind of holy crop rotation. The difference being that in the Torah it says you should work the field for six years and leave it for a seventh.
Nothing could be further from the truth.
First, there is evidence that working a field for six straight years and then leaving it for one year does nothing to improve its yield and may even have a negative effect. Second, the Torah prescribes dire punishments for the non-observance of Shemitta. The seventy years of the Babylonian exile were a punishment for seventy non-observed Shemitta years during the 430 years that the Jewish People dwelled in the Land of Israel. We know that G-d's punishment is always measure for measure. If Shemitta was a matter of crop husbandry, how is exile an appropriate punishment? What does exile have to do with the cessation of agriculture in the seventh year? Furthermore, from an agricultural point of view, seventy years without husbandry can have had no possible benefit for the land. Seventy years of weeds and neglect in no way contribute to the lands rejuvenation, so how is this punishment an appropriate restitution?
To answer these questions we must examine what causes a person to violate Shemitta in the first place.
A great malaise of our own era is the compulsion to overwork. The workaholic defines himself by his job. When you meet someone socially, the question of "What are you?" is usually answered by "I'm a doctor," or "I'm an accountant" or "I'm a rabbi."
There is a fundamental mistake here. What we do is not what we are.
In our society we have confused what we do with who we are. The underlying belief revealed here is that the more I work the more I become myself. Violation of the laws of Shemitta comes from a belief that the more I work, the more money will I make, and the more I make, the more I am the master of my own world.
When a person is sent into exile, all the familiar comforting symbols of his success are taken away from him. He realizes that what he does is not who he is. Both his survival and his identity are G-d given gifts. The insecurity of exile brings a person face to face with his total dependence on G-d.
It is from the perspective of exile that a person can rebuild his worldview so that he can see that what he does is not who he is.

---

fw from hamelaket@gmail.com
from: Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald <ezbuchwald@njop.org>
subject: Weekly Torah Message From Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald
rabbibuchwald.njop.org
Rabbi Buchwald's Weekly Torah Message
Behar-Bechukotai 5780-2020
"Setting a New Standard of Ethical Behavior"
(Updated and revised from Parashiot Behar-Bechukotai 5761-2001)
Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald
This week, we once again read two parashiot, Behar and Bechukotai.
In parashat Behar, in Leviticus 25:14, we find the expression, אַל תּוֹנוּ אִישׁ אֶת אָחִיו, Do not aggrieve one another. Then, in Leviticus 25:17, we encounter what seems to be a repetition of the previous verse, וְלֹא תוֹנוּ אִישׁ אֶת עֲמִיתוֹ, Each of you shall not aggrieve one another.
The rabbis tell us that the first mention of אַל תּוֹנוּ teaches that it is forbidden to hurt people with words or misleading behavior in business. Whereas, the second mention of וְלֹא תוֹנוּ applies to personal conduct.
Contemporary society has so dramatically lowered the standards of proper behavior and comportment, that, unfortunately, hurtful words are hardly considered a bad thing. We've reached the absurd point where a children's rhyme, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never harm me," dictates much of adult behavior. In other words, hurtful words are routinely accepted, as long as no one is physically harmed.
During his tenure as Mayor of New York City, Rudy Giuliani, as part of his efforts to reduce crime in the city, developed, with his then police commissioner, what is now known as the "Broken Windows Theory" of criminology. They argued, that if the authorities could early on stop the petty crime, if they could nip the smaller problems in the bud, then there would be much less serious crime. It could be similarly argued, that if society and its educators would teach all citizens the finer essences of life, the so-called "little stuff,"–caring, concern and empathy, then a new tone could be set for our world, where noble aspirations and expectations would invariably increase.
We often hear the expression, "Don't sweat the small stuff"–which is true perhaps for victims. But, perpetrators should never think that it's small stuff. Small stuff is really big stuff.

In fact, we've reached the point where an act of simple kindness or even an act of simple honesty, acts that should be expected as normal and routine, are now considered "extraordinary." How sad that standards and expectations have been so reduced, because we surely know that small acts of kindness can often have profound impact on people's lives.

I heard a moving story of a young religious man who found someone's personal phone book in a phone booth (must have been a very long time ago!). Because of the Torah mitzvah of הֲשָׁבַת אֲבֵדָה —hashavat aveida, of returning lost objects, he started calling the names in the book that he had found, to try to locate its rightful owner. His efforts were unsuccessful until he reached a woman in Florida who told him that she suspected that the phone book might very well be her daughter's. Before getting off the phone, the woman asked the caller why he was so keen to find the rightful owner. He told her that as a religious Jew he felt obligated to fulfill the mitzvah of "hashavat aveida," of returning lost objects.

It turned out that it was indeed the woman's daughter's phone book. The finder and the owner made a date to meet so the woman could retrieve her property. When the young man returned the book to the rightful owner, the woman was overwhelmed by his kindness, far more than would ordinarily be expected. She explained to the young man, "You not only returned my phone book, you returned my mother to me! You see, when I became religiously observant several years ago, my mother was so distraught, that she stopped speaking to me. She thought that I had joined a cult, and felt that everything that I was doing was crazy. My mother was so impressed by the extraordinary effort you made to return my phone book to its rightful owner, that, for the first time, she understood the validity of my lifestyle. As a result of your kindness, we've been reconciled."

No one should be expected to tolerate "sticks and stones" and physical beatings. Judaism, however, goes much further, declaring that society can not tolerate physical violence or hurtful words and bad names.

Judaism, you see, sets a very high standard. It aims for Utopia. And, who knows, maybe because of its high expectations we will actually encounter much more exceptional behavior, and actually experience a taste of the "World to Come," even in this world.

May you be blessed.

---

fw from hamelaket@gmail.com
www.matzav.com or www.torah.org/learning/drasha
Parsha Parables By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Drasha - Parshas Bechukosai :: Out of the Depths
Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Dedicated to the speedy recovery of Mordechai ben Chaya

This portion contains the tochacha, the stern admonitions and treacherous warnings of what will happen to the Jewish people lest they not observe the Torah. Of course, the prescient predictions of misfortune are preceded with a bounty of blessing if we keep the Torah.

Unfortunately, however, the good comes with the bad, and the unfavorable penalties are not omitted. They are hauntingly clear and undiluted. The Torah details calamity with Divine accuracy. It predicts enemies with foreign tongues will come from foreign lands to capture us. The Torah forewarns that these conquerors will not act like most, to leave the subjugated in their own land. They will, says the Torah, disperse the Jews throughout the entire world. Frightfully, the parsha foreshadows the horrors of the inquisition and Holocaust with descriptions of barbarism, Jews betraying Jews, and mass starvation. The predictions are amazing in their accuracy; and more depressing, we were the victims. It's a very difficult parsha, but the Torah must apprise us about the pain and suffering we will eventually endure.

This essay is in no way attempting to answer why those bad things happened to good people. But two thousand years before the events, the Torah predicts events that are unprecedented in the annals of conquerors and the vanquished. And it happened. Yet the Torah doesn't end it's tochacha only with notes of despair. The strong admonitions close with a promise that, though we will be spread throughout the world we will always yearn for our homeland, feel connected to it, and that an enduring spirit and love for Judaism and our Father in Heaven will never cease. Three thousand years and countless massacres, crusades, inquisitions later it still works. Pretty powerful.

That would have been a great way to end off quite a depressing portion. It would have even been a wonderful way to end the Sefer VaYikra. But the Torah ends the portion with quite an anticlimactic group of laws.

Immediately after the tochacha, it discusses the laws of erechin. A person has the right to donate his own value or the value of any of his possessions to the Temple. He can declare his home, his animals, even himself as subject to evaluation. Moreover, the Torah assesses a value to any living soul. And that value, whether 30 silver shekels or 50 shekels, is to be donated to the Temple. What connection is the last part of the parsha to the stern and ominous portion that precedes it?

After the Nazis invaded the small village of Klausenberg, they began to celebrate in their usual sadistic fashion. They gathered the Jews into a circle in the center of town, and then paraded their Rebbe, Rabbi Yekusial Yehuda Halberstam, into the center. They began taunting and teasing him, pulling his beard and pushing him around. The vile soldiers trained their guns on him as the commander began to speak. "Tell us Rabbi," sneered the officer, "do you really believe that you are the Chosen People?"

The soldiers guarding the crowd howled in laughter. But the Rebbe did not. In a serene voice, he answered loud and clear, "Most certainly." The officer became enraged. He lifted his rifle above his head and sent it crashing on the head of the Rebbe. The Rebbe fell to the ground. There was rage in the officer's voice. "Do you still think you are the Chosen People?" he yelled. Once again, the Rebbe nodded his head and said, "yes, we are." The officer became infuriated. He kicked the rebbe in the shin and repeated. "You stupid Jew, you lie here on the ground, beaten and humiliated. What makes you think that you are the Chosen People?"

From the depths of humiliation clouded in dust, the Rebbe replied. "As long as we are not the ones kicking and beating innocent people, we can call ourselves chosen."

The Kotzker Rebbe explains that the Torah follows the portion of tochacha, the story of Jews kicked and beaten from their homeland, with an even more powerful message. No matter what happens, we have great value as individuals, and as a nation, now and for eternity. Hashem understands that even in the depths of the Diaspora each and every one of us is a great commodity. Lying on the ground, beaten and degraded, a Jewish man, woman, or child can declare his value to the Temple, for no matter how low any nation considers him, G-d values his great worth. And he is considered cherished for eternity. Until the great day when all the nations of the world will also realize the precious value of the tiny nation that dwells amongst them. Good Shabbos

Dedicated in memory of Joseph Michael by Dr. & Mrs. Ernest Goldmann

The author is the Dean of the Yeshiva of South Shore.

---

fw from hamelaket@gmail.com
http://www.israelnationalnews.com/Articles/Author.aspx/1199
Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

chiefrabbi.org
Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis
Dvar Torah: Behar Bechukotai

Do you know a four lettered Hebrew word comprised of the same four letters?

The answer is ווו spelling the word 'U'vavo' meaning, 'and his hook'.

I doubt there is a phenomenon of this sort in any other language and I doubt that there is a letter as significant and powerful as the 'ו' in any other language.

Let's look at an example in Parashat Bechakotai. The Torah presents us with the tochacha in which we're told, God forbid, the time could come when the people of Israel, dispersed amongst the nations, would suffer immeasurably. Hashem then gives us a promise, וזכרתי את בריתי יעקוב I remember my covenant with Jacob – meaning, God tells us – the Jewish people will live on forever.

Rashi highlights the fact that the name 'Ya'akov' in this verse, is spelled with a 'י. It's one of only five occasions in the whole of the bible in which Ya'akov has a 'י. He points out that this matches the five occasions on which Eliyahu the prophet is missing a 'ו' at the end of his name.

Rashi tells us that Ya'akov took the 'י's from Eliyahu as collateral, to guarantee that one day, Eliyahu will come to the descendants of Ya'akov to retrieve his 'י's and then in our presence he would herald the arrival of the great messianic era.

Now, why the ו to represent all of this? In the concluding Mishnah in Masechet Ediyot, our sages teach us that Eliyahu will come ' לעשות שלום בעולם' – 'to make peace on earth'. The ו is the ultimate coordinating conjunction. It is a symbol of togetherness, of unity and of peace. We know from the book of Shemot, that in the construction of the Mishkan, that וים (hooks) were used. And indeed, in the Torah, the letter ו looks like a hook. The וים were used in order to bring all the elements together to construct one edifice.

That's the power of the ו, that's why the middle letter of the Torah is a ו in the word גחון in Parshat Shmini, bringing the two parts together. As is the case with the opening letter of every column of the Torah, with the exception of only five (all for good reasons), starts with a ו, to show that the whole Torah was given as one from Hashem.

So this is the power and significance of the letter ו – and we are finding that it is the prevailing mood and atmosphere within our society right now, as the **coronavirus** sweeps through our counties. In the midst of the tragedy we are seeing a welcome element of unity. People feel connected to one another and at peace.

The reason is obvious! All our societies are being threatened by the same hidden enemy. Let us therefore guarantee that the spirit of the letter ו, this element of togetherness and peace, will prevail well beyond these times.

May we witness the coming of the prophet Elijah, followed by the messianic era speedily in our times.

Shabbat Shalom

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

---

fw from hamelaket@gmail.com

blogs.timesofisrael.com

Behar-Bechukotai: Ordinary Miracles

Ben-Tzion Spitz

To me, every hour of the light and dark is a miracle. Every cubic inch of space is a miracle. - Walt Whitman

It is human nature to take the commonplace for granted. We are not typically amazed that the sun rises every morning. We are not astounded that objects fall when dropped, obeying the laws of gravity. We are not surprised when we speak and sound comes out of our mouths. It's the way the world works and we don't expect it to do otherwise.

The Meshech Chochma on Leviticus 26:4 highlights that, every single aspect of our reality, from the most minuscule microbe to the largest galaxies is miraculous and the direct result of divine intervention. What we call nature is nothing other than a continuous stream of miracles that we have become accustomed to.

He adds that part of the "natural" order is that when a person follows God's commands, he will also receive blessings through "nature."

So if nature is none other than a continuous series of miracles, then what is the purpose of the more extraordinary miracles which capture our attention? The Meshech Chochma answers that the purpose of the more exciting miracles is exactly to get us to notice that God's hand is still involved in the world and that in fact, it's all under His control and direction. God is the composer as well as the ongoing conductor of nature.

That is one of the reasons for the directive to read Psalm 145 (the prayer known as Ashrei) three times every day. Ashrei is composed according to the Alef-Bet. The first verse starts with the letter Alef; the second with Bet; the third with Gimmel, and so on. Each subsequent verse starts with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet, a "natural" progression. Both the content and the structure of the Psalm attests to God's dictating and managing "nature." Therefore, the Talmud states (Tractate Berachot 4b) that whoever recites Psalm 145 three times a day is assured a place in the World-to-Come. By giving continuous testimony and declaring our consistent belief in God's constant presence in nature, our spirits become suitably prepared for a continuous attachment to God after our time in the physical world.

May we appreciate all the miracles in our lives, the mundane, the commonplace, the subtle and the extraordinary, and always give thanks.

Dedication - To the (finally) new Israeli government.

Shabbat Shalom,

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

---

fw from hamelaket@gmail.com

from: Torah in Action /Shema Yisrael <parsha@torahinaction.com>

subject: Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum

Shema Yisrael Torah Network

Peninim on the Torah - Parshas Behar-Bechukosai

פרשת בהר-בחקותי תש"פ

Behar

וידבר ד' אל משה בהר סיני לאמר

And Hashem spoke to Moshe on *Har Sinai* saying. (25:1)

Hashem spoke to Moshe *Rabbeinu* on *Har Sinai* concerning the laws of *Shemittah*, the Sabbatical/seventh year. *Rashi* asks: Why *Shemittah*? How is *Shemittah* linked to Sinai? He explains that the Torah is teaching us that just like *Shemittah* is detailed with rules and fine points, likewise, this applies to all *mitzvos*; their rules and details were taught to them at that time as well. The laws of *Shemittah* were not repeated again prior to the Jews' entrance into the Land. As such, everything took place at Sinai, with *Shemittah* serving as the exemplar, prototype, for all other *mitzvos*. Is this lesson so vital to our observance of *mitzvos* that the Torah underscores the fact that the minutiae of details of the *mitzvos* heralds back to Sinai? Furthermore, to cite the *Ohr HaChaim Hakadosh*, why is *Shemittah* selected, as opposed to any other *mitzvah*, to demonstrate this fact?

Horav Nissan Alpert, zl, explains that the lesson for us is that we have maintained the same degree of sanctity upon hearing the details of the *mitzvah* as we had when we heard its general principles. Sometimes we hear a general concept and we agree, accept and are prepared to move forward with execution until we hear the details, the nitty gritty, daily demands. *Klal Yisrael* did not flinch when they heard the details. Why is this so important?

The *Rosh Yeshivah* offers a number of citations which emphasize the significance of incorporating the Revelation, the moment when we received the Torah at Sinai, into our daily learning. *V'hodaatam levanecha v'livnei vancha…yom asher amadatam lifnei Hashem Elokecha b'Chorev.* "And you shall teach it to your children and to your grandchildren…the day upon which you stood before Hashem, your G-d, in Chorev." We are to incorporate that feeling of awe, trembling and quaking into our Torah study. (*Berachos* 12a) "Each day the Torah shall be (as) new in your eyes" (*Rashi, Devarim* 26:16). The Torah should always appear to us as a gift which everyone seeks to possess and enjoy.

Rashi writes that this "newness" should be our attitude towards the manner in which we relate to *mitzvah* observance. In other words, *mitzvah* observance should be exciting, invigorating, ideal. The problem is: How

does one inject this flavor, this life, into something he has done a thousand times? Is it realistic to expect someone to maintain the same attitude on his 1001st time as he had the very first time he carried out the *mitzvah*?

Rav Alpert quotes the *Chazon Ish*, *zl*, who posits that if each time one performs a *mitzvah*, he does so with the complete intention of fulfilling its every detail, then each time he performs that *mitzvah* it will be as if it was his very first time – as if he had just been commanded regarding its observance.

We now understand the significance of *Shemittah* and why it was (possibly) selected as the *mitzvah* to emphasize detail and newness. *Shemittah* is replete with detail. Furthermore, *Shemittah* is a once in seven-year *mitzvah*. The average Jew probably will not have the *Shemittah* experience more than ten times in his life. Thus, each cycle will present itself as something exceedingly new and novel, something for which he has been waiting for the past six years. We are instructed to view each and every *mitzvah* as we view *Shemittah*, the uncommon, wait-for-six-years *mitzvah*. As the *Chazon Ish* teaches, the key is to view each *mitzvah* as being so special, so precious, that we want to be in the proper frame of mind to carry it out meticulously, with extreme care, paying attention to every detail as if we were performing it for the very first time.

שש שנים תזרע שדך... ובשנה השביעית שבת שבתון יהיה לארץ

For six years you may sow your field… But the seventh year shall be a complete rest for the land. (25:3,4)

The *mitzvah* of *Shemittah* teaches us that Hashem rules the universe. He is the only force in the universe, not the laws of nature. By allowing his field to remain untended and unguarded, the Jew declares to the world that life is not about material bounty. When Hashem says, "Stop," we halt our work, our production – whether it is *Erev Shabbos* or *Shemittah*. We ascribe to a Higher Power, and we believe with complete faith that Hashem will provide for our needs. During the *Shemittah* year, all of the produce of that year is *hefker*, free for all to take; we have no restrictions. Why is it necessary to have our produce become *hefker*? It would have been sufficient simply not to produce, allow the field to remain fallow. If something grows anyway, why should the owner not keep it?

I once heard that *Shemittah* teaches us selflessness. It is not all (only) about us. There are other people in the world. A community is comprised of many individuals: some the same; others different; but we are all in this together. We must learn to place another Jew's interests – if not above our own – at least on par with our concerns. When it has to do with emotions, amenities and the various comforts of life, we are directed to act selflessly and put the feelings and needs of others before our own (unless it is a matter of life, then, *chayecha kodmin*, your life takes precedence).

Why do we find it so challenging to place our fellow's interests above – or at least on par with – our own? Private ownership. When man owns a parcel of property or any material possession, he claims complete mastery over this possession. It is "his," and no one can touch it. We do not want anyone to meddle in our businesses, our affairs, because they belong to "me." While we are comfortable being part of a community, a settlement, a family, when it involves private ownership – stay out! The "private" is the great divide between people. This attitude ultimately leads to an exclusionary, isolationist view on life.

The flipside of private ownership is initiative and incentive for personal achievement. We develop what is our own. We do not care to develop what belongs to someone else. Why toil for someone else?

The Torah presents us with an alternative to the negative aspect of private ownership: *Shemittah*. For six years you may – should – work. For six years it is your initiative, your incentive, your success. The sense of acquisition and domination is very real during those six years – but do not get ahead of yourself, because the seventh year is coming. The flipside/alternative is *Shemittah*. We, who have previously been private owners, now surrender our ownership. As a result, we develop a greater sense of fellowship, because now we have placed our fellow's interests above our own. The self-imposed walls of private enterprise which have separated us from the community have been demolished. Selfishness gives way to altruism and magnanimity; narrow-mindedness concedes to tolerance and impartiality. During *Shemittah*, all Jews were equal, No one owned; no one controlled; no one manipulated. We were as we were meant to be: one people, without dividers between us; Jewish landowners working to develop, and hopefully maintain, a balanced perspective of life. *Shemittah* was when the individual realized that he was part of a larger community of Jews, in which all were equal.

I saw an exposition applying this idea of *Shemittah* inclusiveness to explain what at first glance appears as an ambiguous statement in *Pirkei Avos* (5:13), He who says, 'What is mine is mine and what is yours is yours' – this is a *middah beinonis*, ordinary/average; but some say this is *middas* Sodom." This is extreme. Just because a person wants to keep for himself – what is mine is mine and what is yours is yours – is he similar to the people of Sodom who warranted being destroyed? Yes, he thinks only of himself – never of others. Such a person will never experience a feeling of selflessness. He will be consumed by his selfishness, to the point that if anyone attempts to break through the wall, he will respond negatively. Life is all about him, with no allowance for anyone else. Indeed, why would he be called ordinary or average, unless he represents the contemporary human psyche.

Bechukosai

ונתתי גשמיכם בעתם ונתנה הארץ יבולה ועץ השדה יתן פריו

Then I will provide your rains in their time and the land will give its produce and the tree of the field will give its fruit. (26:4)

"Rains in their time" means the time most convenient for people – such as Friday nights when people are generally at home or close by. When we get "wet," it is for a reason. Hashem defrays anything that might prove to be a nuisance from inconveniencing us. The *Midrash*, however, adds that, at times, an entire community or even a city might have rain in the merit of one person who needs the benefit it provides. *Chazal* go so far as to posit that, at times, Hashem may send rain for the benefit of one field, even one blade of grass. We neither know nor understand Hashem's ways, because we are not privy to everything – past, present or future – that factors into a Heavenly decision. Thus, concerning Heavenly knowledge and Divine power, nothing stands in the way of sending an entire rain shower for the benefit of one meritorious person.

Horav Avraham *Pam*, *zl* (quoted by Rabbi Sholom Smith in "Messages From Rav Pam"), gleans from this *Midrash* (*Vayikra Rabbah* 35:12) an insight that should serve as a source of encouragement and *chizuk* for *mechanchim*, educators. (In truth, as representatives of Heaven on this world, every Jew is a *mechanech* by personal example. Every parent is certainly a *mechanech*.) One has moments in his career (we have all experienced this feeling) in which he works, toils, sweats, prepares, puts all of his life into his *talmidim*, students, but does not see the fruits of his labors. He/she wonders what it is that he/she is doing that is wrong. Something is just not working. Weeks can pass, and the *rebbe*/*morah* feel that he/she is just not reaching the students. How are they to be molded into Torah loyal Jews if their mentors cannot get through to them? The next point of the downward spiral is to give up. "Is it really worth it? Does it make sense to toil to the point of exhaustion, expend blood, sweat and tears in this school, for this class? (As *Rav* Pam underscores, the sacrifice is that much greater and the challenge and obstacles are that much more difficult in an out of town school, far from the major *yeshivah* Torah communities). When the teacher/*rebbe*/*morah* asks the critical question: "Am I making a difference in the lives of these children?" one should begin to worry about the *rebbe*/*morah's* viability in Torah *chinuch*.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* explains that the answer is to be found in the above-quoted *Midrash*, which teaches that it is worthwhile for Hashem to bring rain for an entire field, when, in fact, He only wants to irrigate one blade of grass. A *rebbe* can teach an entire class and, at the end of the day, only one student will go through the system, *yeshivah*, *kollel* and become a *talmid chacham*, Torah scholar, whose erudition impacts thousands. (I add that it does not mean that the rest of the class was not "successful." Every

Jewish child who studies Torah is a success. Some, however, apply that Torah to disseminate it to others (*lilmod u'le'lamed*).) From a Torah-productive perspective, this is meaningful in the sense that the Torah is transmitted and continued. It molds and shapes the student's life. Furthermore, this budding *talmid chacham* has a direct influence on his family: father, mother and siblings. All of this has been achieved through the efforts of the *mechanech*.

I would like to expound on this idea. A *rebbe* can have a class of boys who are, for the most part, doing well. They may not be performing in accordance with the high expectations of the *rebbe*, but they are listening, learning and observing. One boy in the class might be more challenging than the others. His family background might gravitate more to being observant, but not passionately so. As a result of the *rebbe's* influence, the boy becomes more observant, with stronger and greater devotion to *shemiras ha'mitzvos*. Along the way, he *shleps* his father along. In an attempt to assuage and encourage her son's newly-found attitude, the mother changes her own level of observance. When the parents change, the home/siblings change. In the space of a few years, an entire family is transformed: parents, children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. All of this is the result of a *rebbe* who cared. One blade of grass – one *Yiddishe neshamah* – an entire family – generations of *Yiddishkeit*. There is not one *mechanech* that has not impacted the life of "one" student, and, as a result, transformed a family!

או אז יכנע לבבם הערל

Then at last shall their obstructed heart be subdued. (26:41)

Parashas Bechukosai contains within it the first *Tochacha*, Rebuke/curses, whose purpose is to teach *mussar*, ethical direction, reproof, in order to inspire them to wake up and repent. This is alluded to by the above *pasuk*: the rebuke/curses will liberate them from the fetters of the *yetzer hora*, evil inclination. Additionally, rebuke is a good thing - in that it assures us that Hashem cares. *Horav Yisrael Belsky*, zl, explains that a child who misbehaves knows that he is in for a punishment when his parents become aware of his misdeed. What if they ignore it, ignore him? This implies that they do not care; they have rejected him. Indeed, rejection is far worse than punishment, because rejection conveys the message: We have given up on you. Do what you want. It no longer makes a difference to us.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* explains that *yissurim*, suffering, troubles, is a vehicle through which Hashem communicates with us. Sadly, we view *yissurim* negatively, contending that if Hashem loves us, He will not give us pain. This is the attitude of someone who is not thinking. When a person commits a wrong he must be punished, so that he will not continue acting inappropriately. What if the person does not know (or refuses to acknowledge) that what he has done is wrong? He must be told; the wrong must be pointed out to him, so that he can contemplate the error of his ways and correct them. By focusing on the *yissurim* that he experiences, he will be able to identify what it was that he did wrong and purge the evil that catalyzed his negative behavior. When one's actions are recalcitrant, his behavior fractious, he should set his sights on determining the source of the problem.

Suffering is an indication that Hashem believes in the person's ability to correct his error and move on spiritually. It also shows the abiding love Hashem manifests, remembering each one of us and doing what is necessary to curb transgression and spur growth. As *Rav* Belsky observes, Hashem personally attends to the smallest details in every individual Jew's personal life and His nation, collectively, constantly sending a stream of messages and opportunities to enable and encourage us to achieve perfection. This is the meaning of *Hashgachah Pratis*, Divine Providence.

Our function is to believe, to trust in Hashem with unstinting faith that whatever happens is His message, His way of showing love and concern. *Bitachon*, trust, is the key to life. Some have it; others must work on it constantly until they have achieved the peace of mind that comes with total faith in Hashem. By doing this, we will learn to lead our lives in constant reliance on the Almighty, which is really what living as a Jew means: unswerving commitment to Hashem. I close with the words of *Horav Nachman Breslover, zl*, "Do not relate to Hashem about all the suffering that you are experiencing. Instead, tell your troubles that there is a Creator." (In other words, ameliorate your suffering with the knowledge that Hashem is present to support you – if you take the time to listen to the message.)

Indeed, accepting the message with love, and not balking as a result of the pain, is the test which defines one's bond with Hashem. We all experience challenges in the course of our lives, challenges which are commensurate with our ability to withstand and triumph over them. Hashem will not test us with a test that we are destined to fail (out of weakness). The following story is about a Jew whose love for Hashem was boundless, who remained unstintingly committed despite being challenged – and challenged again. Indeed, his attitude was, "Hashem, whatever You throw at me, I am ready."

In one of the premier European communities, a couple resides who waited twenty years for their only child. The husband serves as *Ram*, lecturer, in one of the community's *yeshivos*; his wife is a successful teacher in the local Bais Yaakov. For twenty years, they hoped, they prayed, they retained their calm demeanor. Such was their unwavering commitment, their consummate love for the Almighty. (Incidentally, the wife did conceive twice and gave birth to infants that lived a mere few days.) Not only did they not despair, they would visit with other couples who, like themselves, were still waiting for their first child. They encouraged them, imbuing them with hope. Nothing was beyond Hashem, "Look, after almost twenty years of waiting, we have not given up hope: we wait; we pray; we believe."

Hashem responded positively to their prayers, and a wonderful, beautiful baby boy was born to them. The *bris* was more like a wedding. The entire city shared in their unbridled joy. The couple moved on to parenthood, raising their son in the Torah way. He possessed a brilliant mind and devoted himself to a life of Torah study. He passed many milestones in his Torah achievement as he matured into an exemplary G-d-fearing young man, replete with Torah knowledge, *middos tovos*, extraordinary positive character traits, and completely devoted to mitzvah observance and performing acts of loving kindness. Obviously, *shadchanim*, matchmakers, lined up at his front door with proposals of wonderful girls from outstanding families who were willing to support this young man in a manner that would allow him to study Torah full - time for as long as he desired. He ended up becoming engaged to a special, fine young lady from a background similar to his own. It was a match made in Heaven. Finally, after years of prayer and hope, the parents were seeing their "pay day." The engagement celebration paralleled the celebration rendered for the *chosson's bris*. Unfortunately, the joy that permeated the community lasted for only a few days – when the *chassan* began to complain of severe, painful headaches. He was rushed to the hospital where, after testing, the grim prognosis was confirmed: he was suffering from a terminal disease, with mere weeks to live.

The average parent who hears such shocking news would understandably fall apart, complain, grieve, pray. The reaction of this young man's parents was to strengthen themselves with faith and trust in the Almighty. What Hashem does is for the good. Who are we to argue? These were the same parents whose faith during twenty years of childlessness remained resolute. As soon as they learned the frightful news, they knocked on the door of their new *mechutanim*, parents of their son's *kallah*, with the news and their proposal, "We do not want your daughter to suffer for even one day. We have come to revoke the match. Our son agrees. He does not want such a special girl to experience the pain of loss."

The *mechutanim* wept. The *kallah*, who at that moment was in another room, also wept. After a few moments, the *kallah* came out of her room and spoke, "I refuse to break the *shidduch*. Such a young man, who is the consummate *ben Torah*, is rare. I pray along with everyone in the community that my *chassan* be cured." It was decided the entire community would storm the Heavens on behalf of the *chosson*.

A few days later, the individual who related this story was walking past one of the small *shtieblach* (*shuls*) in the community when he heard bitter weeping emanating from within the *shtiebel*. He went inside to see if

anyone was in need of assistance. He noticed a man standing in front of the *Aron Kodesh*, crying bitterly. As he came closer he became aware of the man's identity: he was the *chosson's* father.

"My Father, my loving Father," he cried. "You must believe me when I assert that I have no grievance against You. Whatever my wife and I have received from You until now has always been kindness. Nothing that You will do to me will cause my faith to weaken or my love to diminish. I will remain steadfast in my love and devotion to You. The bonds that we have developed with You are as strong as ever. They will never be torn asunder. Indeed, no matter what occurs, I will devote myself even more to Your service.

"If, by some miracle, my son lives, we will do everything within our means to enable him to spend his life studying Torah. Nothing will stand in our way to provide for him."

The listener was all shaken up by what he had just seen and heard. Word spread. They knew that their friend (the father of the *chosson*) was a devout, G-d-fearing Jew, but were never aware of his extraordinary faith in Hashem. That *Shabbos*, the *Rav* addressed the congregation, "We have in our midst an individual of unique spiritual character. It behooves us all to help him in his time of need. Every one of us must repair our inter-relationships, elevate and sanctify our lives, dedicate ourselves with greater fervor to the service of Hashem through Torah study and *tefillah*, prayer. Let it all be a *z'chus*, merit, for the *refuah sheleimah*, full recovery, of the *chosson*."

Everyone listened and immediately acted. The community was transformed. Within days, one could hardly recognize its members. To listen to them *davening Shacharis*, the morning prayer, one would think that it was *Neilah*, the *Yom Kippur* closing prayer. They were all on a mission to intercede and catalyze the *chosson's* return to good health.

A few days passed, and the *chosson* went in for a PET scan to determine the status of the growth invading his brain. The doctors looked at the scan and called the chief of medicine, who was just as perplexed as they were. The growth had disappeared as if it had never been there. The chief of medicine told the *chosson* and his parents that the only explanation for this phenomenon was: Heavenly intervention, a miracle! When one has true faith, it is a reality in which he believes on a regular basis. Everyone came together to pray for a miracle for the life of a young man whose entire existence was miraculous.

Va'ani Tefillah

מודים אנחנו לך...על חיינו המסורים בידך – *Modim anachnu lach…Al chayeinu ha'mesurim b'yadecha*. We gratefully thank You… for our lives …which are in Your hands.

Bircas Hodaah, the blessing of Thanksgiving, is the eighteenth blessing. It is very appropriately placed, because 18/*chai*/life implies that the purpose of your life is to recognize Hashem's kindnesses and to thank Him for it by serving Him in the manner that He so directed us. Yet, we allow this overriding purpose of life to elude us, when, in fact, without life, we could neither sin nor go about our lives as we please. We live life as if we deserve it, taking for granted that life is the greatest Heavenly gift that we can receive. It is one thing not to pay gratitude, but how can one have the audacity to abuse the very gift that he receives by taking that gift and using it against our Heavenly Benefactor? If we would take the time to focus on the far-reaching meaning of *Modim*, what and why we are thanking – we would act differently to the point that our obligation to say *Modim* would serve as a deterrent from sin.

Dedicated in memory of Mrs. Seliga Ahuva (Schur) Mandelbaum
זליגה אהובה בת הרב דניאל ע"ה כ"ו אייר תשנ"א
"תנו לה מפרי ידיה ויהללוה בשערים מעשיה"
by her extended Schur family

prepared and edited by Rabbi L. Scheinbaum

---

fw from hamelaket@gmail.com
from: Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff <ymkaganoff@gmail.com>
to: kaganoff-a@googlegroups.com

The Origins of a Siyum?
Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Question #1: Friday Finish
May I make a siyum on a Friday?
Question #2: Biblical Finish
May I use a siyum on a book of Tanach to avoid fasting on erev Pesach?
Question #3: No One Finished
A chaburah of which I am a member is completing a mesechta in the Nine Days. Everyone of us has missed the shiur at times, so none of us has actually completed the entire mesechta. Can we eat meat when we celebrate this siyum together?

Introduction:

At the end of this week's double parshiyos of Behar and Bechokosai, we celebrate the siyum of the completion of another chumash of the Torah. Since, unfortunately, most of us have been unable to hear the reading of the Torah, I though it would be a good time to reflect on the halachic background of making a siyum.

Several Talmudic and Midrashic passages serve as sources for the simcha and celebration appropriate for completing an important learning project or other mitzvah activity. As always, our goal is not to issue halachic rulings for any individual; that is the role of each individual's rav or posek. Our purpose is to provide educational, halachic background on the topic at hand.

The most obvious Talmudic passage about the concept of siyum on studying Gemara is a quotation in which Abayei stated, I will be rewarded because whenever I heard that one of our young Torah scholars completed a mesechta, I made a seudah for all the other scholars (Shabbos 118b). As Rashi explains, Abayei was the rosh yeshiva and made a siyum for his yeshiva when one of his talmidim completed a mesechta.

Shehasimcha bi'me'ono

The Maharshal considers a siyum mesechta such a great celebration that he writes that the introduction of the bensching after the seudah in its honor should warrant the addition of the words shehasimcha bi'me'ono, "that this celebration is in His Presence." We usually recite this passage only at a wedding or at a sheva brachos. The Maharshal, however, felt that a siyum and a pidyon haben also warrant this recital. His reasoning is straightforward:

The Gemara (Kesubos 8a) cites a dispute whether shehasimcha bi'me'ono is recited at a bris, concluding that it is not recited for an interesting reason. Since, at a bris, the child suffers some pain, we should not imply that it is a moment of simcha for everyone in attendance. The Maharshal reasons that a siyum is a greater celebration than a bris, because all the participants are be'simcha. A similar line of reasoning may be applied to a pidyon haben. As a result, we should recite shehasimcha bi'me'ono when bensching after either of these smachos.

We actually find this issue discussed earlier than the Maharshal, who lived in sixteenth- century Poland. The Abudraham, who lived in Spain during the thirteenth century, cites an opinion that one should recite shehasimcha bi'me'ono at a pidyon haben, but he rejects this for the following reason: Sometimes, there could be a very tragic situation in which the pidyon haben is performed after the infant has died, in which case there would not be a simcha, but additional grief for the parents, and, as a result, no recital of shehasimcha bi'me'ono. (Explaining this halachic scenario requires a lengthy discussion of the laws of pidyon haben, which is not the topic of this article.) Since this situation can happen, it was decided never to recite shehasimcha bi'me'ono at a pidyon haben.

The Abudraham does not discuss whether we should recite shehasimcha bi'me'ono at the bensching of a siyum. Standard practice is not to recite shehasimcha bi'me'ono after either a siyum or a pidyon haben. The likely reason for this practice is that there is a difference between a seudas mitzvah that is also a simchas mitzvah, such as those celebrating a wedding, a bris or

a sheva brachos, and a seudas mitzvah that does not qualify as a simchas mitzvah, such as a meal celebrating a bar mitzvah, siyum or pidyon haben. Although the meals served in celebration of a siyum and a pidyon haben are seudos mitzvah, and, according to some opinions, a seudas bar mitzvah is also, none of these qualify as a simchas mitzvah. The recital of shehasimcha bi'me'ono is appropriate for a simchas mitzvah, not a seudas mitzvah.

There are other differences affected by whether an event qualifies as a seudas mitzvah or also as a simchas mitzvah. For example, an aveil may not attend a simchas mitzvah, and therefore he is precluded from attending a wedding or sheva brachos. However, he is permitted to attend a seudas mitzvah, and, for this reason, he may attend a siyum, and, according to most authorities, a pidyon haben.

Another source for a siyum

Returning to our theme of a siyum for completing a learning project, here is a second source for the practice of celebrating the achievement of a mitzvah. When the construction of the Beis Hamikdash was completed, the celebration lasted for fourteen consecutive days. The Gemara notes that this celebration was so significant that Yom Kippur was not observed that year in Yerushalayim, since they were all celebrating the dedication of the Beis Hamikdash (Moed Katan 9a). How can a celebration be so important that they actually ate in its honor on Yom Kippur?

That this celebration superseded fasting on Yom Kippur was derived from a kal ve'chomer. When the mishkan was dedicated, for the first twelve days, private korbanos of each of the nesi'im were offered (Bamidbar Chapter 7), which means that some of these korbanos were offered on Shabbos. Yet, we know that korbanos of an individual never supersede Shabbos. The only possible conclusion to be reached is that dedicating the mishkan was so important that it superseded Shabbos.

Dedicating the Beis Hamikdash has greater significance than the dedication of the mishkan, since the Beis Hamikdash was a permanent structure. And since Shabbos, which is holier than Yom Kippur, was superseded by the celebration of the dedication of the mishkan, certainly proper celebration of the Beis Hamikdash supersedes Yom Kippur. Since observing the fast on Yom Kippur would take away from the immense simcha and celebration involved in inaugurating the Beis Hamikdash, the fast of Yom Kippur was set aside that year!

Obviously, celebrating the inauguration of the Beis Hamikdash is a much greater simcha than a siyum on a mesechta, or even the siyum hashas of all the daf yomi shiurim around the world. Nevertheless, this Gemara conveys the value of completing a mitzvah, which includes the completion of a learning project.

A third source

Yet another source for the festivity of a siyum is based on the following passage of Gemara (Taanis 31a). There the reason provided for the gala festival of the 15th of Av was because it was the annual date on which Klal Yisroel completed chopping the wood necessary for the Beis Hamikdash. Since this was the culmination of a long mitzvah, finishing it every year required a major celebration, similar to completing the Torah (Tosafos Yom Tov, Taanis 4:8).

We should note that this event was celebrated by the entire community, not only by those who actually participated in chopping, gathering and processing the wood. In the same spirit, the Maharshal writes that it is a mitzvah to participate in a siyum, even if you did not participate in the learning (Yam shel Shlomoh, Bava Kama 7:37; see also Pri Megadim, Mishbetzos Zahav 444:9).

This reminds me of an observation that I heard many times from my Rosh Yeshiva, Rav Yaakov Ruderman, that when one person completed Shas in a town in Eastern Europe, it was commonplace that the entire town wore their Shabbos clothes that day – to demonstrate their happiness that the town now boasted another Jew who had completed Shas!

Simchas Torah

The tremendous rejoicing of Simchas Torah is also an extension of this idea, since we are celebrating that we have completed a cycle of reading the Torah (Or Zarua and Hagahos Ashri, end of Sukkah). In earlier generations, this included inviting the entire community to a festive meal, sponsored by the chassan Torah, in which fine delicacies were served (ibid.).

For this reason, I know that some gedolim emphasize that hashkafah droshos on Simchas Torah should not discuss future commitments to learning – the goal on Simchas Torah is to celebrate what has been accomplished, and discussing future commitments detracts from the celebration!

On the other hand, this creates a question: At the time of the Gemara, there were different customs regarding how often the reading of the Torah was completed (Megillah 29b). Today, it is universally accepted that we complete the Torah reading every year; but at the time of the Gemara, there were communities that completed the Torah only every three years, or three-and-a-half years (twice in a shemittah cycle), as explained by the Maharshal (Kol chilukei dinim… #48, printed in Yam shel Shlomoh after mesechta Bava Kama).

Notwithstanding that those following this custom did not complete the Torah annually, the Gemara (Megillah 31a) teaches that the reading for Simchas Torah begins with Vezos Habracha, the last parsha of the Torah. For those communities that read the entire Torah every year, the reading of Vezos Habracha is very appropriate on Simchas Torah, because this is the day that the annual reading of the Torah is completed. But why did those who completed the Torah reading only every three years read Vezos Habracha on Simchas Torah -- they were only a third of the way through the cycle of reading the Torah?

This question is raised by the Meshech Chachmah (end of Vezos Habracha), who provides a fascinating answer to the question.

There are two different reasons why we read Vezos Haberacha on Simchas Torah:

(1) Because it completes our reading the Torah.

(2) Because the beginning of parshas Vezos Haberacha alludes to the fact that Klal Yisroel accepted the Torah from Hashem sight unseen, whereas the other nations rejected the Torah (Rashi at the beginning of Vezos Haberacha).

This symbolism is reflected in the offerings of the bulls as public korbanos in the Beis Hamikdash on Sukkos and Shemini Atzeres, the latter being the same Yom Tov as Simchas Torah. (In Eretz Yisroel, this one day Yom Tov is universally called Simchas Torah.) Cumulatively, through the seven days of Sukkos, we offer seventy bulls, one for each of the nations of the earth. On Simchas Torah, we offer only one bull, which represents the unique relationship that Klal Yisroel has with Hashem (Rashi at the end of parshas Pinchas). For this reason, Vezos Haberacha is an appropriate reading for Simchas Torah, even in places where they did not complete the reading of the Torah that day, since it commemorates the special relationship that exists between Hashem and the Jewish people, which we celebrate enthusiastically on Simchas Torah. (See also the Collected Writings of Rav Hirsch, Volume III, page 106, where he explains the celebration of Simchas Torah in a similar way.)

A fourth source

Returning to the gala festivities associated with a siyum, another Midrash is quoted as a source for this celebration. The posuk reports that when Hashem appeared to Shlomoh Hamelech in a dream and offered him his preference for a present, Shlomoh requested wisdom. Upon awaking he discovered that he had now been given colossal understanding. He then went to Yerushalayim, stood near the aron of Hashem, brought many korbanos to thank Hashem for his new knowledge and made a party for the entire nation to join in his celebration. The Midrash concludes that this teaches that we should make a seudah upon attainment of a Torah milestone (Shir Hashirim Rabbah 1:9).

Fridays

At this point, we can discuss our opening question: "May I make a siyum on a Friday?"

Allow me to explain the question: The Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chayim 249:2) prohibits having a fancier meal on Friday than is usual, because this

takes away from the honor due Shabbos. The Rema contends that a bris or a pidyon haben that falls on a Friday is an exception to this rule and can be observed on Friday, which, he notes, is the accepted custom.

What about a siyum on a Friday

In a note that is all of four words long, the Biur Halacha (249:2 s.v. Oh) writes that, just as a bris or a pidyon haben may be celebrated on a Friday, so may a siyum. Presumably, he feels that the celebration of a siyum should not be delayed, even to complete the learning until Shabbos or Sunday, in order to celebrate it in a timely fashion.

However, other authorities disagree with the Biur Halacha's conclusion, contending that the completion of the learning should, indeed, be delayed in order to avoid holding the siyum on Friday, noting that even regarding a pidyon haben, not all authorities agreed with the Rema's conclusion to hold it on Friday (Ketzos Hashulchan 69:7 in Badei Hashulchan). (We should note that an early authority, the Maharam Mintz, ruled that you can delay the completion of a mesechta to an appropriate time that you wish to celebrate, and complete the mesechta at that time [cited by Shach, Yoreh Deah 246:27].)

Tanach or Mishnah?

At this point, we can discuss the second of our opening questions: "May I use a siyum on a book of Tanach to avoid fasting on erev Pesach?" In other words, completing what type of learning project qualifies as a siyum?

The halachic authorities discuss this question in the following contexts. Does attending such a siyum exempt a firstborn from fasting on erev Pesach? Does it permit people to eat meat or drink wine during the Nine Days? These questions are discussed by several halachic authorities, among whom I found the following rulings:

The Pnei Yehoshua (Brochos 17a) understands that when Rabbi Yochanan, the amora, completed studying the book of Iyov, he made a seudas siyum, similar to that made when completing a mesechta. This implies that completing a book of Tanach qualifies as a siyum, but it does not teach us to what depth it must be studied, since Rabbi Yochanan certainly studied Iyov in great depth.

Some rule that someone who has a proper seder studying a book of navi may celebrate a siyum on erev Pesach, even if it is a small sefer, and may use it as a basis to avoid fasting. However, if he was studying it primarily to be able to avoid the fast, he may rely on such a siyum only if he studied a large sefer of Tanach, but not a small one (Shu"t Ha'elef Lecha Shelomoh #386). Others rule that one can use a book of navi as a siyum for these purposes only if it was studied in depth (Shu"t Igros Moshe, Orach Chayim #157).

We should also note that the Elyah Rabbah (551:26) rules that you should not speed up or slow down your learning in order to use a siyum as a reason to eat meat during the Nine Days. The Elyah Rabbah also suggests that, if this individual does not usually make a siyum when he completes a mesechta, he may not make a siyum during the Nine Days for the purpose of allowing people to eat fleishig.

No one finished

At this point, we can discuss the third of our opening questions: "A chaburah of which I am a member is completing a mesechta in the Nine Days. Everyone of us has missed the shiur at times, so none of us has actually completed the entire mesechta. Can we eat meat when we celebrate this siyum together?"

Many authorities quote a passage of Gemara (Bava Basra 121b) and the commentary of Rashbam thereon to demonstrate that this is a valid siyum. There the Gemara explains that the immense celebration associated with the 15th of Av was because this was the date when the chopping and gathering of the wood used in the Beis Hamikdash was completed every year. These authorities note that it was not one individual, nor even one group that participated in this holy and extensive project, but it was a large, joint effort completed by the last group on that date. This approach allows us to answer the third of our opening questions: "A chaburah of which I am a member is completing a mesechta in the Nine Days. Everyone of us has missed the shiur at times, so none of us has actually completed the entire mesechta. Can we eat meat when we celebrate this siyum together?

Rav Reuven Margaliyos explains why this qualifies as a valid siyum, even though no individual finished the entire mesechta. He compares it to the following two halachic concepts. First, there is a halachic principle that when two people together perform a melacha that each could not do on his own, they are culpable as if each performed the melacha by himself. This halachic concept is called zeh eino yochol ve'zeh eino yochol. Rav Margaliyos notes that if this provides sufficient reason to make someone culpable, it certainly qualifies as a reason to benefit, because of the halachic principle of merubah midah tovah mimidas pur'anus, that a positive attribute is greater than something harsh (see Yoma 76a et al).

A second proof rallied by Rav Margaliyos is the halacha that if two people own a bull together that kills someone, both owners are obligated to pay the kofer, the atonement money, as if they were the sole owner. Thus, we see that a financial obligation can be created by my being part of a group. If so, it is certainly true that I can celebrate something that was accomplished by a group (Nefesh Chayah, Orach Chayim 551:10, quoted in Daf al Daf).

Conclusion

From all the above, we see the beauty and celebration that is associated with completing a large mitzvah project, and particularly, the achievement of completing a siyum after studying something in appropriate depth. I wish everyone my brochos of cheilecha le'oraysa, always use your strengths and talents to study and observe the Torah!

Angel for Shabbat, Behar-Behukotai

by Rabbi Marc D. Angel

In this week's Torah portion, God reminds the Israelites that He brought them out of Egypt. "And I have broken the bars of your yoke, and made you go upright (komemiyut)" Vayikra 26:13. The commentary, Hizkuni, notes that just as an ox lifts its head when the yoke is removed, so the Israelites' heads rose when they were freed from servitude in Egypt. Rashi comments that "komemiyut" means the Israelites could now walk upright, rather than be stooped over like slaves. Saadia Gaon notes that "komemiyut" indicates that the Israelites were now free people.

In kabbalistic thought, it is taught that when people receive something that they did not earn they are guilty of eating "the bread of shame". Thus, in order for the Israelites to walk upright and not be ashamed of their newly given gift of liberty, they had to "earn" their freedom by serving God through fulfilling His commandments. This was their side of the covenant with the Almighty. By living according to the Torah's precepts, they would "earn" the right to be a free and upright people.

This lesson applies to many aspects of life. We should not simply be "takers" who receive goods and services from others. We also should be "givers" who do our share to repay the many benefits we enjoy. If we take out of proportion to what we give, we are guilty of eating "the bread of shame". We don't live with the quality of being upright and free.

This is true on a personal level. We should not exploit the kindness of friends and acquaintances, but should return their kindnesses gladly and generously. This is true on a communal level. We should not expect synagogues and schools and other institutions to be there for us when we need them, but we should be members and supporters so as to carry our own weight to the best of our ability. This is true on the national and international level. We should not expect others to provide for us, without our willingness to provide for their needs as well.

Sometimes people think they come out ahead if they take something without having given anything commensurate in return. They think they have "beaten the system". Actually, such people humiliate themselves because they are eating "the bread of shame". They do not realize that taking something without giving back to the best of their ability--is degrading and debasing. It is the behavior of people who lack pride and self-respect.

God wanted the Israelites to walk upright--komemiyut. He did not want them to have a slave mentality any longer. To give dignity to them, He gave them the Torah's laws and traditions--He gave them a way of "repaying" God, of earning their bread. They could create a righteous community; they could become a light unto the nations. By working for these lofty goals, they would avoid eating "the bread of shame".

Our lives should not be viewed as a contest to take as much as we can and to give as little as we can get away with. Rather, life is an adventure of human interrelationships where we all win when we all do our share. To walk in freedom and dignity, we need to avoid eating "the bread of shame".

This email sent from:

The Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals
2 West 70th Street
New York, NY 10023
United States

Parshat Behar Behukotai: Mitzvot of Shev'it and Yovel

by Rabbi Eitan Mayer

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

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

A LOOK AT THE TEXTUAL LANDSCAPE:

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

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

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

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

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

THE HOLINESS THEME:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

MY PET THEORY ABOUT KEDUSHA (AGAIN):

What is 'holy' about Yovel and Shemita? Taking a certain view of kedusha would make this question irrelevant, or at least unanswerable: if we understand kedusha as some sort of mystical/metaphysical/spiritual quality of ethereal, mysterious, imperceptible nature, not apprehensible by either the senses or the intellect but only by the soul (perhaps), then we can close the books right here. What could we possibly have to say about something we cannot perceive or understand? If the Torah commands us to be "holy" and then tells us that Yovel and Shemita generate "holiness," then we should of course observe Yovel and Shemita so that we can become "holy."

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

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

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

context is not quite the same as "kedusha," which carries that all-important connotation of "higher purpose."]

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

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

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

KEDUSHA AND RESTRICTION:

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

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

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

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

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

The connection between restrictions and kedusha is quite direct:

Kedusha = Dedication --> Restricted Access.

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

HILLUL:

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

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

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

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

THE KEDUSHA OF YOVEL AND SHEMITA:

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

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

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

In other words, Shemita and Yovel bring us:

1) Generosity toward the poor (free food in the fields).
2) Improvement of the land (letting it lie fallow).
3) Mercy toward the poor (canceling debts).
4) Mercy toward slaves (freeing them).
5) Economic security for all (return of land to original owners).
6) Prevention of economic domination over others (return of lands).

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

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

VAYIKRA 25:

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

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

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

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

Reading further in the Torah, it appears true that there is an interpersonal dimension to the requirement to return all land to its original

owners at Yovel, but the Torah's justification for this mitzvah points clearly at Hashem, not at man: **"The land shall never be sold permanently, for ALL THE LAND IS MINE; for you are 'immigrants' and temporary dwellers with Me."**

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

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

SEFER HA-HINNUKH, MITZVAH 84:
"Among the roots of this mitzvah: to fix in our hearts and vividly paint in our minds the concept of the creation of the world, for in six days did Hashem create the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh, when He created nothing, he proclaimed rest for Himself . . . Therefore He, blessed is He, commanded that we also declare ownerless (le-hafkir) all that the fields produce in this year, besides the prohibition of agricultural work: in order than man should remember that the land, which produces fruits for him every single year, does not do so on the basis of its own strength and qualities, but instead that it has a Master over it and over its [human] owners, and when He desires, He commands that it [the produce] be declared ownerless . . . .

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A LOOK AT THE BOOKENDS:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

MEETING THE CHALLENGE:

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

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

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

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

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

HINTS FROM THE RAMBAM:

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

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

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

[See also 4:27, 8:18]

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

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

TWO SIDES OF A COIN:

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

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

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

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

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

Rambam, Laws of Fast Days, Chapter 1:

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

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

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

As the tokhaha begins, Hashem warns that He will punish us for ignoring Shemita and Yovel; according to the interpretation we have been developing, the point is not so much to punish us as to provide a less friendly way of achieving what Shemita and Yovel were supposed to achieve (26:14-17). Our planting will yield nothing (as our voluntary non-planting during Shemita should have done) and our security will be destroyed by diseases which blind and confuse us. Our sense of control and mastery will be shattered by defeat at the hands of our enemies. If we still do not respond, we are punished further (18-20): Hashem will "smash the pride of your power"; He will turn the sky and ground into unyielding metal, and our attempts to violate Shemita will amount to nothing. At this point the Torah introduces the word 'keri': "If you behave with Me with keri" (21), if you ascribe these disasters simply to global warming or acid rain or ozone depletion or any other cause unconnected with the theological lesson of Shemita and Yovel, "I will add to your suffering seven times for your sin." (Not that environmental damage should be ignored.) Because we refused to make our food available to the animal as commanded during Shemita, the animals will help make us suffer (22) and topple the sense of domination and order we have imposed on the world. Hashem sarcastically asserts that He will respond to our claim of 'keri' with more of that 'keri'; if we believe it is all just part of the natural process, then we will just keep getting more of that 'natural process' until it dawns on us to wonder whether something is amiss. Eventually, we are to be exiled, and then "the land shall enjoy its Sabbaths." Again, Hashem speaks with bitter

sarcasm: if we refuse to accept Shemita and Yovel, and if we reject our suffering's meaning, then finally at least the unthinking *land* will understand and will celebrate Shemita when there is no one left to pick up a shovel and violate the Sabbath of the land.

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

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

Shabbat Shalom

Parshas Behar Behukotai: 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."

The author is Educational Coordinator of the Jewish Studies Institute of the Yeshiva of Los Angeles

Parashat Be-Hukkotai: "Listen Up . . . Or Else"

by Rabbi Eitan Mayer

This week's parasha presents the first of the two major 'tokhaha' sections in the Torah: sections in which we are told in detail what exactly 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 on our understanding of Hashem's nature? [Another issue of philosophy; not exactly 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 beHar, last week's parasha, the Torah says:

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

This introduction is followed by the mitzvot we discussed last week: 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.

Last week we discussed the effect of these mitzvot on us: they 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 axiological 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 last week's parasha 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 this week's parasha), 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 BeHukotai,

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 working 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 your 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 there will be sin in you. 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 century, and considering that most of us are products of Western culture to a significant degree, threats don't usually have much effect. (If this is not obvious to you, 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 with a mitzvah which arrives 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 to global warming or acid rain or ozone depletion or any other cause other natural process unconnected with the theological lesson of Shemita and Yovel, "I will add to your suffering seven times for your sin." 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 other blessings only if we keep Shemita and Yovel because otherwise these blessings begin to compete with Hashem for our attention. Only if we 'voluntarily' impose Shemita and Yovel on ourselves and remind ourselves of the ultimate goals to which we are to dedicate ourselves can we be trusted to properly interpret the meaning of our success.

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

Shabbat Shalom

Parshas 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.

Parashat Be-Hukkotai: "Listen Up . . . Or Else"

by Rabbi Eitan Mayer

This week's parasha presents the first of the two major 'tokhaha' sections in the Torah: sections in which we are told in detail what exactly 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 on our understanding of Hashem's nature? [Another issue of philosophy; not exactly 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 beHar, last week's parasha, the Torah says:

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

This introduction is followed by the mitzvot we discussed last week: 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.

Last week we discussed the effect of these mitzvot on us: they 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 axiological 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 last week's parasha 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 this week's parasha), 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 BeHukotai,

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 working 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 your 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 there will be sin in you. 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 century, and considering that most of us are products of Western culture to a significant degree, threats don't usually have much effect. (If this is not obvious to you, 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 with a mitzvah which arrives 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 to global warming or acid rain or ozone depletion or any other cause other natural process unconnected with the theological lesson of Shemita and Yovel, "I will add to your suffering seven times for your sin." 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 other blessings only if we keep Shemita and Yovel because otherwise these blessings begin to compete with Hashem for our attention. Only if we 'voluntarily' impose Shemita and Yovel on ourselves and remind ourselves of the ultimate goals to which we are to dedicate ourselves can we be trusted to properly interpret the meaning of our success.

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

Shabbat Shalom

Parshas 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.

****

THE TANACH STUDY CENTER www.tanach.org
In Memory of Rabbi Abraham Leibtag
Shiurim in Chumash & Navi by Menachem Leibtag

****

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-ha**aretz** - 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 chiastic structure discussed in our shiur on Parshat Behar.]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

THE TOCHACHA & SEFER BREISHIT

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

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

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

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

Recall as well how God was 'mithalech' in Gan Eden (see Br.3:8). Similarly, He will now 'mithalech' in Eretz Yisrael together with His Nation: 'v'e-ithalachti betochachem, ve-hayiti lachem 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 chiastic structure within Sefer Vayikra itself. See if you can find this structure, noting how chapters 18 and 20 'surround' chapter 19, the connection between chapter 21 and chapter 16 in relation to the kohen gadol, chapters 22 and 11-15 in relation to **tum'a & tahara**, chapters 9-10 to chapter 23 in relation to cycles of 7 & 8, chapter 24 and chapter 8 in relation to the keilim of the mishkan, and chapters 6-7 and chapters 25-26 in relations to mitzvot given at **Har Sinai** (see finale psukim of both sections), 've-akmal'!

D. THE VALUE OF THE INDIVIDUAL

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

Even though these laws seem to be rather technical, from a certain perspective they do reflect the value of every individual. But what does that have to do with the conclusion of Sefer Vayikra? As Ramban points out (see middle of his commentary to 26:11), the "tochacha" describes 'reward and punishment' at the national level. In other words, it promises prosperity in relation to the land's agriculture, political stability, security, and military success (see 26:1-11). On the 'down side' - it describes primarily national calamities 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 "l'einei ha'goyim" - in the eyes of the nations -in the finale pasuk (see 26:45 in its context), emphasizing the connection between God's covenant with the people of Israel and their influence on the rest of mankind.]

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

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

E. THE CONCLUSION OF VAYIKRA & SHAVUOT

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

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

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

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

On the other hand, chapter 25 contains much more that 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 2310-11)
>
> [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 Tihiyu" (i.e. Vayikra chapter 19)!

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

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

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

****

THE TANACH STUDY CENTER www.tanach.org
In Memory of Rabbi Abraham Leibtag
Shiurim in Chumash & Navi by Menachem Leibtag

****

PARSHAT BEHAR

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

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

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

INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

STORY TIME?

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

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

MORE PROBLEMS!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

WHERE DO THEY BELONG?

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

THE NER TAMID (24:1-4)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A BACKWARD 'BACK TO SHMOT'

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

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

Let's take a look:

THE TOCHACHA (26:3-46)

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

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

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

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

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

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

WORKING 'BACKWARDS'

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

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

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

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

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

Note the obvious textual similarities:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

THE CHIASTIC STRUCTURE OF SHMOT & VAYIKRA

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

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

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

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

The following chart illustrates this structure:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

BRIT SINAI & KEDOSHIM TIHIYU

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

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

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

shabbat shalom
menachem

==========

FOR FURTHER IYUN

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

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

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

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

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

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

PARSHAT BEHAR - SIGNIFICANT SUMMARIES

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

AN OVERVIEW OF PARSHAT BEHAR

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

I. The LAWS SHMITTA & YOVEL

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

II. LAWS RELATING TO THE YOVEL CYCLE

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

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

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

THIS LAND IS 'HIS' LAND

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

RELATED LAWS

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

1) His field, or
2) Himself.

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

Let's see how each pasuk is special.

ERETZ CANAAN IS NOT FOR SALE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

This explains the cases where one was forced to sell his

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

WE ARE SERVANTS OF GOD, NOT MAN

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

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

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

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

shabbat shalom
menachem