BS"D
May 24, 2024
Friday, May 24 is the 31st Day of the Omer
Motzi Shabbat/Sunday is Lag B'Omer

Potomac Torah Study Center
Vol. 11 #33, May 24-25, 2024; 16-17 Iyar 5784; Behar

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

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

Hamas continues to manipulate the media while pretending to negotiate with Israel. Hamas recently released a video including Hersh Polin Goldberg, cousin of very close friends of ours. We continue our prayers for the hostages and all our people stuck in Gaza. With the help of Hashem, Israel and a few friendly countries prevented an attack by Iran from causing more than minimal damage. May our people in Israel wipe out the evil of Hamas, protect us from violence by anti-Semites around the world, and restore peace for our people quickly and successfully – with the continued help of Hashem.

Behar is the one time that the Torah specifies in the text that Hashem speaks to Moshe on (at or next to) Har Sinai when presenting mitzvot. B'Nai Yisrael arrive next to Har Sinai before the Revelation and remain there until 20 Iyar of the second year (Bemidbar 10:11). (Next Tuesday is the 3335th anniversary of B'Nai Yisrael leaving the base of Har Sinai to continue toward Israel.) The Torah could have mentioned at any time between Shemot 18 and Bemidbar 10 that Hashem speaks to Moshe B'Har Sinai (by the mountain). What is so distinctive about the laws of Shemita that the Torah specifies this proximity only on this occasion?

God promises Avraham, on a few different occasions, that He will give His special land to his descendants – and repeats the promise to Yitzhak and Yaakov. What our avot realize is that the gifts that Hashem gives to them come with restrictions. They are to use the land and wealth to enable them to call out in Hashem's name, to teach others about monotheism -- that Hashem is the one and only God. They are also to teach tikkun olam, that we humans have an obligation to make the world a better place – especially by assisting those less fortunate than we are.

After the Revelation, the Torah immediately goes to Mishpatim, a parsha with 53 of the total of 613 mitzvot in the Torah – commandments that focus on how to treat others. The focus is on our obligations toward widows, orphans, and immigrants – the most needy members of society. Our obligations to fellow humans is a constant theme throughout the Torah, prophets' messages, and Jewish post-biblical history.

Consider some of the main messages of Behar. No human may own land in Israel. Hashem owns all the land and has given holdings to specific tribes and families within the tribes. No human may take permanent ownership of any land in Israel or any other person (slave). Ownership of slaves ends on each Shemita year, and land reverts to the original land grants (from the time of Yehoshua) every Yovel year. Jews who own land in Israel are more like tenants of Hashem, renters whose responsibilities are caring for our fellows rather than paying rent to the land owner.

Given the background elsewhere in the Torah, how can a person be surprised that God places special restrictions on His gift of land in Israel? Our responsibilities to help our fellows is a constant theme in the Torah. Gifts that come with restrictions and special responsibilities is exactly how God rewards our Avot. My reaction in reading Behar is "of course" – any thinking person who has understood the Torah to this point should be expecting requirements to share the blessing of land with more needy individuals and families.

Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander brings the message of Behar to the current situation in Israel. He identifies the heroes in Israel since October 7 – righteous people who have put aside their needs to focus on the welfare and redemption of the victims of Hamas. Rabbi Brander reminds us that righteous individuals search for opportunities to redeem our fellows, to make the world a better place. Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, z"l, gives a similar message in relating the mitzvot of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl, a"h, benefactors to the Jewish communities in Israel and England, people whose focus was on what the needy want, not what they assumed others would appreciate. Rabbi Sacks reminds us that the Torah is not a history book. It is a book of law, a book informing us how we should (and must) live to create as good a society as possible. These messages from two of the most outstanding Rabbis of the last half century demonstrate that the Torah's emphasis on Shemita as a central mitzvah is critical. God's ultimate ownership of the land and of human beings implies all the other mitzvot. Next week we come to the Torah's reminder that ignoring Shemita is grounds for the land vomiting the people out of Hashem's land.

My beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, loved the land of Israel and visited as often as possible. His parents and sister moved to Israel when they were able to do so. Rabbi Cahan always brought back books and art from Israel to make available to his congregants – in the days before the Internet made this sort of merchandise purchase easy. Thinking of Israel always makes me feel closer to Rabbi Cahan's presence.

Shabbat Shalom,

Hannah and Alan

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

Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Hersh ben Perel Chana (Hersh Polin, hostage to terrorists in Gaza); Moshe Aaron ben Leah Beilah (badly wounded in battle in Gaza but slowly recovering), Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Reuven ben Basha Chaya Zlata Lana, Yoram Ben Shoshana, Leib Dovid ben Etel, Avraham ben Gavriela, Mordechai ben Chaya, David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha; Rena bat Ilsa, Riva Golda bat Leah, Sarah Feige bat Chaya, Sharon bat Sarah, Kayla bat Ester, and Malka bat Simcha, and all our fellow Jews in danger in and near Israel. Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

Shabbat Shalom

Hannah & Alan

Parshat Behar: Worthy or Not, We Are Ready for Redemption

By Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander * © 5784 (2024)
President and Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone

Dedicated in memory of Israel's murdered and fallen, the refuah shlayma of the wounded, the return of those being held hostage in Gaza, and the safety of our brave IDF soldiers.

Ever since October 7th, we have all been on the lookout for heroes. In the face of tragedy and villainy, we seek out those who can inspire us to carry on, to see the best in humanity, in ourselves that enables us to move towards redemption. The brave soldiers and civilians who fought with every breath to save innocents during the attack. The thousands of Israelis serving on the front lines, along with Jews from around the world who have put themselves in harm's way to show support for our homeland. Those on the home front who dropped everything to identify bodies, house the displaced, embrace the families of the hostages and the reservists, tend the fields, attend the funerals, care for the wounded, and so much more. Each person who has done their part has left a mark on all of us, strengthening us and encouraging us that a better tomorrow will follow these dark days.

Rav Chaim Attar, the Or ha-Hayyim, in his commentary on this week's parsha, unearths a reference to the righteous people who hasten the redemption. The Torah (Vayikra 25:25-28) describes a situation in which a landowner falls on hard times, and is forced to sell off his inherited portion of land. Under these circumstances, a relative is charged to be a 'redeemer' – to purchase the field in order to keep the land within the family. But if no redeeming relative is available or wishes to act in that role, then the land may indeed be sold to another person – but only until the Jubilee year, at which point it is returned to the original owner.

For R. Chaim Attar, this passage is not merely a directive for those who face financial difficulty; rather, it is to be read metaphorically, offering "a great insight for the dwellers of the earth." The portion of real estate is, in the metaphor, the land of Israel centered in Jerusalem, and the financially disadvantaged Jew is, in fact, the spiritually impoverished Jewish people, who are subjected to exile and loss of their freedom and sacred land. In such a moment, it is the responsibility of the 'redeemers' – namely, the righteous of each generation who are themselves 'relatives' of God – to bring about redemption through their leadership and actions that impact the lives of our nation. Moreover, says R. Chaim Attar, even if no redeemer from the righteous rises up, the very suffering of the Jewish people shall be seen by God, and eventually the Jubilee, the end date for the exile, will arrive, even without the Jewish people having accrued sufficient merit.

There are thus two pathways to ultimate redemption: the opportunity seized by the righteous to redeem the people, and the eventual deadline to end our suffering.

As we look around us, we can say with certainty that the time for redemption has come. Countless righteous people, of every age, stripe, and religious affiliation, have accrued for our people unimaginable merit through their unending care for the welfare of their brethren. It is important to remember that **righteous people are not defined only as those who formally observe the 613 commandments. It is those who are willing to put their personal wants to the side and focus on the welfare /redemption of the people.**

Last week, I heard Avidan Beit Yaakov speak on Channel 12 prior to the burial of his son Roi, who fell in a friendly-fire incident in Gaza. Avidan stated "the soldiers in the tank [who fired on the building where his son was located] are tzadikim – righteous people. This happens in war, and I have no anger towards them … I hug them and their commanders need to hug them; after the war is over and they have finished their mission – not before – they are invited to come to our home for us to give them hugs with no questions asked."

Our suffering in these past few months, when taken along with all the suffering of our people in its millenia of exile, should certainly be enough by now as well. Whatever the pathway, whether God considers us worthy or not, we are ready for

ultimate redemption, to embrace “the day after,” when our people will be united and our wounds will be healed. This cannot come fast enough. In the meantime, we will continue to look for, and strive to be, heroes.

* Ohr Torah Stone is a modern Orthodox group of 32 institutions and programs. Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Riskin is the Founding Director, and Rabbi Dr. Brander is President and Rosh HaYeshiva. For more information or to support Ohr Torah Stone, contact ohrtorahstone@otsyny.org or 212-935-8672. Donations to 49 West 45th Street #701, New York, NY 10036.

Behar: The Formula for Success

By Rabbi Label Lam © 5779 (2019)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Employing “The Tree of the Life” versus “The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Bad” is the difference between going food shopping with an itemized shopping list and food shopping without a list. If one has a list there is a greater likelihood

that he will navigate through all the tempting food isles and exit the store with only what was needed. If one doesn't have list then the shopping cart will be filled with extra junk and the cost will be high.

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

https://torah.org/torah-portion/dvartorah-5779-behar/

Behar – The Rosh Yeshiva Responds – Can a Lender Charge the Borrower for the Opportunity Costs of a Loan?

by Rabbi Dov Linzer
President and Rosh HaYeshiva of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah

> *do not exact from him advance or accrued interest, but fear your God. Let him live by your side as your kinsman* (Vayikra 25:36)

QUESTION — Washington, DC

One person wants to lend a large sum of money (short-term loan) to another. The lender will withdraw money from an investment account to do this. In order to liquidate the investments, the lender will have a tax penalty and also have opportunity costs because he won't be making money over the course of the short-term loan. I assume it is ribit (forbidden interest) to charge for the opportunity costs. Can the borrower pay the capital gains tax penalties that will result or is this considered ribit as well? Thank you.

ANSWER

Payment to enable the loan, even before the loan, is *ribit mukdemet,* prepaid interest. There is a debate between the Rambam and the Rosh how explicit this has to be, but it seems that it is pretty explicit in your case. Prepaid interest is a rabbinic prohibition. If the money/gift will be given back if the loan doesn't take place it would be *ribit ketzutzah* fixed interest and forbidden mid'orayta, at a biblical level.

* President and Rosh Yeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, Bronx, NY. [Hebrew text omitted because of issues moving across software products that do not translate easily.]

https://library.yctorah.org/2024/05/ryrbehar/

Parashat Behar: "My Faith, My Land, My Name"

By Rabbi Yehuda Hausman *

> *And God spoke to Moses at Mt. 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 keep a Sabbath to the Lord.* (Vayikra 25.1-2)

The opening verses of this week's portion are like stage directions for a play. The setting is Mt. Sinai. The characters are God, Moses, and the Children of Israel. But the content is not a drama unfolding in the desert, but a lesson in the laws that will reign once Israel enters the Promised Land: laws for the Seventh Year and laws for the Fiftieth Year; Laws for Levitical cities and laws for lending and luckless farmers.

The passages anticipate a change in self-identity. The Nation shall become much more than the Children of a man named Israel. They will become the Children of a land of the same name.

> "*I am the Lord your God. Who took you from the Land of Egypt , to give you the Land of Canaan, to be unto you a God."* (Vayikra 25.38)

This is the story of Am Yisrael. In Egypt, we became a nation. In the wilderness, we found our faith. In the Land of Israel, we found a home. This is the tale we recite every Passover, as we've done for 3,300 years. Yet we have another name and another story that is only slightly less ancient. We are not just the People of Israel. We are also the Jewish People.

About 2,700 years ago, in the year 722 BCE, the Northern Kingdom of Israel fell to the Assyrian Empire. Most of the inhabitants, the 'Ten Lost Tribes,' were forcefully relocated. The rest fled south and were absorbed in the southern Kingdom of Judah. This precipitated a national name change. In their respective tongues, first the Babylonians, then the Persians, then the Romans called us Yehudim — Jews. Though a far better translation would be Judeans.

Unlike the German (and Middle French) Jude, the 'd' was carelessly dropped by the Normans as they crossed the choppy English Channel. Thus, one may forgive the Anglo who assumes that a Jew is someone who practices Judaism. Not exactly. A Jew is a person who traces his or her ancestry to Judea, where the local faith was aptly named Judaism. Josephus, writing in Greek, used the term "Ioudaismos" (ουδαϊσμός). This is our second story. Driven from the land by Babylonians and then again by the Romans, Jews bore on their backs this Judean faith as they spread to every corner of the globe.

Though the Nation of Israel and the Jewish People are one and the same, in recent months, I have thought a great deal more about the latter. Over Passover, I ventured twice to UCLA to visit its anti-Israel "encampment." For thirty years, I've enjoyed UCLA events, classes, recreation facilities, and extensive libraries. So, the hubris of young aspirational Guy Fawkeses and Che Guevaras harassing students and dictating where Jews could and could not go, I found personally offensive.

The activists first pitched a dozen tents on a wide lawn in front of the magnificent red-brick facade of Royce Hall. Two weeks later, it was a military stockade. Tall, overlapping, wooden boards and heavy railings compassed a four-sided fortress. Canopies, tarpaulins, and beach umbrellas blocked air surveillance. Masked sentinels stood guard at the gates. When I approached, they barred entry with their bodies. The kippah and lack of keffiyeh were surely my undoing.

Even as the exterior grew increasingly fortified, the messages displayed within and without remained visible and vehement. It was disheartening to see the countless posters and scrawled graffiti libeling "ZioNazis" for fabricated crimes. Yet I found some satisfaction in black-lettered banners declaring the encampment's occupants "Anti-Zionist, Not Anti-Jewish."

Ironically, every anti-Zionist who utters the word Jew unknowingly reminds us of our origins. All the wishful thinking in the world cannot change the simple truth that Zion was the name of that Jerusalem hilltop around which those Judeans built their capital.

Introducing myself on a Pickleball court, recently, I got a familiar question: "Ya-hoo-da?? What kind of name is that?" Dismissing the usual responses, I grinned and said, "It's Judean."

* Semikhah, YCT Rabbinical School 2010; B.A. and M.A., Near Eastern and Judaic Studies, Brandeis University. Teaches at various Judaic institutions in Los Angeles.

https://library.yctorah.org/2024/05/behar5784/

Thinking Ahead, Far Ahead: Thoughts for Parashat Behar

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

In parashat Emor, we read: *And you shall count for yourself (usfartem lakhem – plural)" seven weeks of the Omer.* In this week's Torah portion, Behar, we read: *And you shall count for yourself (vesafarta lekha – singular) seven Sabbath years.* Why is the plural used when counting the weeks, and the singular used when counting years?

An answer: the commandment to count seven weeks is addressed to the public at large. The Torah assumes that people can keep focused on a mitzvah for seven weeks. However, when it comes to counting years for the sabbatical cycle, the Torah addresses itself to the sages of the great court – to individuals, not to the general public. Most people cannot stay focused for such a long span of time as a fifty year cycle. This commandment was aimed at those specially gifted individuals who are so wise and so visionary that they can think ahead and plan for the fifty year cycles.

It is understood that not everyone can dream great dreams, can stay clearly focused on the long span of the future. Yet, that is exactly what religious leadership is called upon to do. I would suggest that this is what every Jew is expected to aspire to do – even if it is known in advance that most of us will fall short.

Religious leadership needs to be in the hands of those who are great dreamers and visionaries, those who see the long view of Jewish history and destiny, those who are tirelessly committed to serving God and humanity with love, kindness, compassion, wisdom.

Our society has an overwhelming tendency toward short-term planning. Companies' stocks go up or down based on quarterly profit reports; company executives face tremendous pressure to show immediate results. People want instant information — via internet, iphones, facebook etc. The news is fed in quick, catchy sound bites. The media need to produce news, to attract advertisers and revenues. Few journalists have the time, inclination or luxury to actually study events in historical context, or to offer reasoned projections for the coming decades. Politicians and public personalities communicate by short twitter comments, or with slogans. They don't give us thorough analysis of the issues; they don't provide depth of context or logical projections for the future. They want to get re-elected. They can't worry about ten years from now or fifty years from now. And the electorate is equally impatient, concerned with the moment or the few months or years ahead.

This tendency has had a profound impact on religious life. People are demanding short term spiritual satisfaction. Sects and small religious groupings are multiplying at a rapid pace; each group attempts to satisfy a particular "market niche" among the public. Few seem to be thinking about the long-term viability of religion, or what constitutes a "healthy" religious organization. Rather, "success" is often measured by the prevailing business model: how many "customers" do we have? How much income did we bring in?

Who is thinking about our souls? Who is investing the time and thought to foster a religious life that is deep and strong, that can withstand popular pressures and market demands? Who is reminding us that when it comes to the human spirit, instant gratification is not the path to long- term growth and development?

The 19th century historian, Henry Adams, offered a distinction between a politician and a statesman. A politician listens to what the public is saying and then formulates policies in line with popular opinion. In contrast, a statesman formulates carefully thought-out policies, and then tries to persuade the public to adopt them. A politician seeks popularity and expediency, and is a slave of public opinion; a statesman seeks what is best – even if not popular — for the well-being of society, and attempts to shape public opinion accordingly. A politician speaks and acts for the moment; a statesman speaks and acts for the long-range good of the society.

Religious life, along with all other aspects of life, requires that we all try to be statesmen rather than politicians; that we all seek to think carefully about the past, about our current context, and about the future. The strategy of short term gratification is not one upon which to build a healthy society.

The Torah highlights the uniqueness of those individuals who can think beyond the framework of weeks, and who can envision terms of fifty year cycles. This is a challenge for each of us. We need to be thinking ahead, far ahead.

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

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

https://www.jewishideas.org/thinking-ahead-far-ahead-thoughts-parashat-behar

---

The Hatred Syndrome

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

It is a strange feeling to be hated by people who don't know you and don't want to know you. It is perplexing to hear people calling for your death and the death of all your people without ever considering your humanity, your goodness, your contributions to society.

Haters don't see their victims as fellow human beings. They create and foster ugly stereotypes. They promote outrageous conspiracy theories that dehumanize their targets.
Hatred is an ugly thing. It not only promotes hatred of the perceived enemy, but it distorts the lives of the haters themselves. Energy and resources that could be utilized to build compassionate societies are instead diverted to hatred, weaponry, death and destruction.

We have always been aware of an under-current of antisemitic and anti-Israel attitudes, but things today seem qualitatively and quantitatively different. We witness throngs of people throughout the United States and throughout the world who brazenly and unabashedly call for the annihilation of Israel and the murder of Jews. The public display of raw hatred is alarming.

I suspect that almost all of those spewing hatred of Israel and Jews don't even know Israelis or Jews in person. They don't hate actual Jews: they hate stereotypes of Jews. They are indoctrinated with propaganda and are fed a stream of lies about Israel and about Jews. The haters are steeped in their hateful ideology and are not interested in civil dialogue and relationship with actual Jews and Israelis. They know little or nothing about the connection of Jews to the land of Israel going back thousands of years, from Biblical times to the present.

So why do so many haters take aim at Jews and Israel? Some of this hatred stems from anti-Jewish religious teachings. Some of it stems from jealousy at the phenomenal success of such a tiny group. Some people spew hatred as a way of making themselves seem important, as though picking on Jews somehow makes them appear stronger and braver.

Erich Fromm has written of the syndrome of decay *that "prompts men to destroy for the sake of destruction and to hate for the sake of hate."* Many people poison their own lives with hatred and only feel truly alive and validated when they express hatred of others.

When societies allow hatred to flourish, they are sowing the seeds of their own destruction. When universities, media and political forums condone blatantly anti-Jewish intimidation and violence, the infection spreads well beyond Jews. Civil discourse is threatened. Respectful dialogue is quashed.

All who stand for a civil society must not be intimidated by the haters, bullies and supporters of terrorism. The syndrome of hate eats away at the foundations of society. It must not be allowed to prevail.

Rav Nahman of Bratslav taught: The whole world is a narrow bridge (precarious), but the essential thing is not to be afraid, not to be afraid at all.

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

https://www.jewishideas.org/node/3221 This Op Ed by Rabbi Marc D. Angel appeared in the Jewish Link, April 11, 2024.

Behar: Do Your Best Deal!

By Rabbi Mordechai Rhine *

The Parsha begins with the Mitzva of Shemita (leaving the land's produce free for all during the seventh year) and declares that this Mitzva was given at Sinai. What is the significance of singling out Shemita as Divine from Sinai?

The commentaries explain that Shemita — particularly in an agricultural society — represents a person's livelihood. The message is that even when we are doing business we are governed and guided by the Mitzvos of Hashem.

A bit later in the Parsha, the Torah identifies how far the attitude of Torah is intertwined with our business dealings. In addition to the many financial Halachos in business and the laws about payment of damages, the Torah (Vayikra 25:14) directs us regarding purchases, *"Do not take advantage of your fellow."* This means that while we are certainly allowed to seek out good deals as we understand them, if a buyer or seller doesn't realize the market value of an item, we are not allowed to take advantage of his ignorance. The Torah requires that we do business in good faith enabling people to get the appropriate deal that they are entitled to. (Shulchan Aruch 227)

The Sefer HaChinuch (337) explains that the goal is that each person should benefit from that which Hashem blessed him. When we do business with another, there is a genuine goal that we be a catalyst of goodness for others even as we do well. In today's lingo we refer to this attitude as "Win-Win." The goal is that each party, for their own reasons and due to their own unique circumstances, gets a benefit from the transaction. Thus, certain types of clever negotiation tactics might well be forbidden if they are misleading or deceitful and therefore deprive the other person of the opportunity to make a fair and honest living.

The Talmud (Baba Basra 15) tells us about Iyov that anyone who did business with him was blessed. Many understand this on a spiritual level. Doing business with Iyov was good luck, or at the very least good for a person's reputation. But the Talmud provides an additional piece of information which can serve as a clue as to why people who did business with Iyov did well. The Talmud says that Iyov was generous. He was the kind of person who did not negotiate till the last coin. Once he was good with a deal, he was willing to let the other person "keep the change."

Every Jew strives to intertwine Torah with business by making Hashem a partner in his endeavors and giving Maaser (ten-percent tithe) to Tzedaka. But sometimes it is possible to do good even in the business itself by taking the blessings Hashem gave us and granting others the opportunity to do well as well. The Mishna Berura (231) gives an example: A wealthy man can expand his business so that he can provide jobs to people in need. History is full of people who were wealthy and took advantage of their workers for their own continued advancement. Fortunate is the person and his generation who sees his wealth as a blessing to be used to assist others in fair and equitable employment.

I am fond of the story that happened with a friend of mine who walked into a business meeting with his Tzitzis hanging out as he always wears them. The client asked him cautiously what those strings were about. "Are they religious?" he asked in a tone that indicated he wasn't sure if he should stay or go. My friend's response put him at ease, "These — yes, they are religious — they remind me to be honest and fair in all my dealings."

The Talmud (Baba Metziah 83) relates that some porters broke a barrel of wine while they were working for Rabbah bar Bar Chanah. The Rabbi was instructed by Rav that since the porters were poor, he should not claim the damages and

should even pay them for their day's work. While this is not the letter of the law there are times that a person is asked to go beyond the letter of the law so that the people who interact with us should also be blessed.

Indeed, many ask the question, *"What does Shemita have to do with Sinai?"* To the Jew who strives to intertwine his business dealings with a higher calling, Shemita has everything to do with Sinai. Financial success comes from Hashem, who instructed us at Sinai. The laws and attitudes He instructed us with guide us in our dealings. Our goal is to get the very best deal, for ourselves and for the person with whom we are dealing.

Shemita has everything to do with Sinai. We wouldn't want it any other way.

With best wishes for a wonderful Shabbos!

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

Behar – Finding Myself in Community

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer * (©2022)

One of the greatest challenges of a Torah lifestyle is balancing our own needs and identity with the needs and identity of the community. There can often be tension between our needs or our family's needs and the needs of the greater community. At times, there can also be a conflict between our own identity and personality and that of the community. We may have our own standards and preferences for our own family, and they may be different in subtle or even large ways from the standards and preferences of the broader community.

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

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

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

One of the mitzvos of the Jubilee year is that Jewish slaves must be set free. Some of these slaves may have been working for their masters for decades. It can be very hard for a master to free a slave who has been a trusted pillar of the household for so long. The slave as well may have forgotten what it is to be free, or simply be comfortable with his role

within the household, and not want to leave and start on his own. The Sefer Hachinuch explains that it is for these individuals that we blow the Shofar in the Jubilee year. The sound of the Shofar is a call to action and strengthens one's heart. When he hears that call to action and knows that it is being sounded throughout the country, he knows that everyone else is also facing the loss of their Jewish slaves. The slave hears that call and knows that the other slaves are also facing the struggle of starting out on their own in life. When they realize that the community as a whole is facing similar struggles, this gives them the strength and courage to rise to the challenge and do what needs to be done.

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

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

* Savannah Kollel; Congregation B'nai Brith Jacob, Savannah, GA. Until recently, Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD. Rabbi Singer will become Rosh Kollel next year.

Behar

by Rabbi Herzl Hefter *****

[Rabbi Hefter did not send a Dvar Torah for Behar. Watch this space for his future Devrei Torah.]

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

Behar – The Law of Giving, the Secret Formula of Success

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia *

In his book *Give and Take,* Adam Grant, the youngest tenured professor and single highest-rated teacher at Wharton School, explains the secret of Jewish success and perseverance.

Well, he did not set out exactly to do that, but rather to figure out a real life paradox. On one hand, a survey of thousands of people in diverse cultures in Australia, Chile, Finland, Germany, Israel, Malaysia the United States and others, most people rate values they associate with giving such as helpfulness, responsibility, social justice and compassion, higher than values associated with taking, such as wealth, power, pleasure and winning. In the workplace, on the other hand, many people, employers, employees and peers alike, seem to value the takers more than the givers.

After examining the qualities of givers and takers in all aspects of the workplace and social life, though, Grant presents us with the conclusion that the most successful people, in a sustainable way, are givers and not takers. As you read the book, you will find out why takers such as Jonas Salk and Frank Lloyd Wright suffered from long dry spells of creativity and innovation, and how it was possible to identify Kenneth Lay, four years before Enron's demise, as a taker who could cause this calamity – based on a single photo. You will also meet happy and successful givers, such as the man nicknamed "the giant panda of programming," who announced his retirement in his mid-thirties, as well as salespeople, hospital staff, employers and a president who thrive because of their giving qualities.

I preordered the book the moment I read the first review, because I felt that Adam Grant spells out clearly and scientifically the concepts which are fundamental to the understanding and practice of Judaism. I was not disappointed. We all know that the Torah revolves around the concept of giving, but not just giving charity. A person who truly lives a life of Torah must constantly be aware of the well-being and benefit of others, and therefore all of his or her actions should be guided by the principle: Love the Other as You Love Yourself! This is not an easy task, but well informed parents who are also keen on education will inculcate this quality in their child. If those parents were farmers living at the time of the Temple, the task would have been easier for them because of the intricate system of social justice the Torah put in place. Imagine, for example, a teenager who helps his dad out in the fields, working day and night, in extreme temperatures, to strive for the best crops possible. That kid knows that his father wants to maximize the output of the field, but when harvest time comes, the father sets aside ten percent. "What is this for?" asks the perplexed child, and the father answers: "this is for the poor!" That moment has embedded in the kid the knowledge that all of his hard work should not be selfish but directed for the benefit of others.

Indirectly, though, he will benefit also, because if you want to give more to the poor, you have to produce greater crops. And it is not only at the fields. The rabbis tell us that Gemilut Hassadim – loving kindness can be done with anyone and anything, with a word, with your time, providing connections and advice and finding someone a job. As a matter of fact, that last thing, finding someone a job, is ranked by Maimonides as the highest level of Tzedaka. It was the motto of my grandfather, a"h, R. Shaul Fetaya, who established an occupational rehabilitation center for people with physical and mental handicaps. There was no greater joy for him then to see an employee leaving the center in order to incorporate in the normal marketplace.

Unfortunately our current lifestyle, fast-paced, urbanite and more gadget than person-focused, makes it a little difficult to appreciate and enjoy the full benefit of giving. It would be very helpful to create small giving rituals. Beside the daily coins, let us make it a habit to help, three or four times a day, someone we hope to get nothing from in return, be it with a smile, an advice, an easing of pressure or renewing contact. The catch is that we mustn't do it thinking that we are going to gain from it. We must train ourselves to be able to let go of our own ego and needs at times and put ourselves completely in the other's shoes, so to speak.

Judaism, unlike other religions, has made giving the cornerstone of its existence, and it owes the giving-network its existence and continuity under the harshest circumstances in the most hostile places. Wherever Jews, went they established the communal institutions to support the poor and the needy: a school, a synagogue, lodging for poor visitors, Bikkur Holim, soup kitchen and tzedaka fund. This modular structure of the Jewish community allowed it to take care of its members and help other communities. It also helped in fostering and nurturing commercial and financial connections. For example, when Marco Polo visited the Mongolian ruler Kublai Khan, they conversed through an Italian Jew who came with Marco Polo, and a local Jew, both Hebrew speakers.

When the Torah was given to Moshe on Mount Sinai, the transformational and revolutionary power of giving was revealed to the world. The Tablets of the Law are divided traditionally to two columns, and there are many ways to interpret the reason for the division. Think of it this way: the first five are about what God gave us – spirituality, freedom, Justice, Shabbat and Family, and the last five are about not taking what belongs to others, their life, Relationships, Property, Justice and Freedom. They are also framed accordingly. If you take only the first and last words of each side, the first half would spell out: אנוכי... נותן לך – I am giving you, while the other half would be לא... לרעך אשר – Not that which belongs to others.

The Torah pushes us to constantly improve ourselves and maximize our potential in order to be able to help others. The greatest joy of a giver, Grant writes, is to see that the one he or she helped are doing the same, helping others. If we would all embark on a giving campaign, giving of our time, attention, and resources to others just in order to help them and to make this world a little better, this world would have become much better.
Shabbat Shalom

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

Even Dirt Sometimes Needs a Vacation

By Rabbi Moshe Rube *

Sometimes dirt needs a vacation. Specifically the dirt, soil, silt, clay, ground and mud of the Land of Israel.

Our portion of Behar gives us the idea of Shemittah or The Sabbatical year, just like we take one day of rest every seven days, the ground of Israel gets a break for one year out of every seven years. During that year we do no planting, harvesting, plowing or fertilising. We just leave the soil alone and allow it to re"jew"venate.

It is interesting how we treat the land like we would treat a person. We all know that if we were to push ourselves seven days a week without any respite, we would suffer and our work would suffer. We can sometimes fall into the trap of thinking that working all the time leads to more productivity. But it doesn't.

Part of work and growth means taking a step back. It means doing other things and allowing ourselves to rest from that particular task and involve ourselves with other human involvements like having a meal with loved ones.

We treat the Land of Israel as we would treat any human being, allowing it to rest and not whipping it year in and year out to be productive. The Land of Israel is like a Person of Israel to us. So much so that God warns that the land will rebel and vomit us out should we not keep the Shemittah year. Overworked people can only be pushed so far.

Do not we Jews of New Zealand find ourselves in a unique position to understand this idea? In my travels around New Zealand, I've seen many landmarks like the Whanganui and Te Urewera that the New Zealand government has recognised as a person. So maybe the next time any of us go to Israel, we should give the ground a pat and say "Shalom Aleichem."

Shabbat Shalom.
]I'd like to wish a Tzeischem Lishalom and fare thee well to Kay Harris. It's been such a pleasure getting to know you throughout my time here. Thank you for being a wonderful part of our lives in Auckland and an integral part of the AHC for all these years. We wish you the best in all your future travels.[editor's note: The Shabbat email includes a beautiful two page letter from Kay Harris discussing her 56 years in New Zealand and her lifetime service to the congregation and Jewish community.

* Senior Rabbi of Auckland Hebrew Congregation, Remuera)Auckland(, New Zealand. Formerly Rabbi, Congregation Knesseth Israel)Birmingham, AL(.

Rav Kook Torah
Behar: The Hetter Mechirah for the Sabbatical Year

> *"When you come to the land that I am giving you, the land must be given a rest, a sabbath to God. For six years you may plant your fields, prune your vineyards, and harvest your crops. But the seventh year is a sabbath of sabbaths for the land."* (Lev. 25:1-4)

A Brief History of the Hetter Mechirah

As the Jewish people began to return to the Land of Israel in the late 1800s, establishing farms and agricultural settlements, the question of letting fields lie fallow during the sabbatical year became — for the first time in many centuries — a burning issue. With the approach of the sabbatical year of 1889, the Jewish settlers turned to the rabbinate to issue a hetter)permit(to allow them to continue working their lands during the seventh year, so that the young and fragile agricultural settlements would not collapse.

Three respected scholars met in Vilna and designed a hetter mechirah, temporarily selling the land to a non-Jew over the sabbatical year. The hetter was approved by Rabbi Yitzchak Elchanan Spector, chief rabbi of Kovno and the pre-eminent Halachic authority of the generation.

During the following sabbatical years of 1889, 1896, and 1903, many of the new settlements utilized the hetter. However, a number of highly respected scholars vociferously opposed the leniency. Among the opponents were Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, the Netziv)Rabbi Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin(, and Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch.

The Sabbatical Year of 5670)1909-1910(

In 1904, Rav Kook arrived in Eretz Yisrael, serving as chief rabbi of Jaffa and the surrounding moshavot. Leading up to the sabbatical year of 1910, Rav Kook took a forceful position defending the hetter mechirah. He penned a treatise entitled Shabbat Ha'Aretz which explained the legal reasoning behind the permit, along with a discussion of the laws for the sabbatical year.

While Rav Kook was an original and creative thinker, he usually took a relatively conservative position in Halachic matters. What led him to support the lenient position in the hetter mechirah controversy?

We can learn much about his underlying concerns from letters that he wrote during this time. The following quotes are from letters in the first volume of Igrot HaRe'iyah.

Reasons to Support the Hetter

While still in Latvia, Rav Kook and his father-in-law, Rabbi Eliyahu David Rabinowitz-Teomim)the "Aderet," rabbi of Ponevezh and later chief rabbi of Jerusalem(, discussed the issue at length. In his letters, Rav Kook admits that at that time they both opposed the hetter.

> *"From afar, when we heard the arguments of those who permit and of those who forbid, we both leaned toward the stricter opinion. But when the Aderet arrived in the Land of Israel, he saw with his own eyes that it is impossible to even consider not making some sort of arrangement for the sabbatical year."*)p. 258(

Seeing first-hand the precarious state of agricultural settlements was a critical factor in changing Rav Kook's mind. He understood that full observance of the sabbatical year could endanger lives and would likely bring about the collapse of the new settlements.

A second concern was that the entire enterprise of the national return to the Land of Israel could fail over this issue. At that time, the nascent economy of the Yishuv in Eretz Yisrael was based on the commercial sale of agricultural produce.

> *"The Jewish Colonial Association]JCA[representative informed me that the JCA is preparing plans to buy much more property in the Holy Land. But if we decide that there is no permit to allow work during the seventh year via some legal sale, then the representative will be forced to advise that they should invest their money in Canada and cease supporting projects in the Land of Israel.*

> *He also explained that]if lands will lay fallow during the sabbatical year[, the Arabs will take control of Jewish land during the sabbatical year by grazing their herds on them, and it will be necessary to take them to court."*)p. 285(

A third concern — and perhaps the most important for Rav Kook — was his fear that a strict ruling would plainly demonstrate that Judaism is incompatible with the modern world and building of a Jewish state:

> *"Even worse is the potential condemnation of Judaism and widespread rejection of Torah observance as a result of a strict ruling, Heaven forbid, in this matter. The anti-religious elements are hoping that the rabbis will forbid]all agricultural activity during the sabbatical year[. Then they will have gained a great victory. They will have demonstrated that by listening to the rabbis, the land will be laid waste, the fields and vineyards will become desolate, and all commercial ties for the sale of wines, oranges, and other agricultural produce will be broken — ties upon which the survival of the Jewish settlement truly depends."*)p. 258(

The Halachic Underpinnings of the Hetter

In his letters, Rav Kook also discussed the legal reasoning behind the hetter mechirah. The sale is actually based on a number of independent, mitigating factors, each one lessening the severity of working the land during the sabbatical year.

The most important factor in taking a lenient stance is the ruling of most Halachic authorities that nowadays the sabbatical year no longer retains the status of Biblical law. Since it is Rabbinically-ordained, we may apply various leniencies, according to the principle of sfeika d'rabbanan lekula.

The hetter only permits those types of agricultural labor that are not Biblically prohibited, even when the sabbatical year itself is Biblically ordained. Thus, planting, pruning, harvesting, fruit-picking, and perhaps plowing must still be performed by a non-Jew hired to work the field. This clause ensures that no Torah prohibitions are violated, even according to the minority opinion that even nowadays the sabbatical year is Biblically ordained.

The Maharit1 in a responsum permitted renting out land to a non-Jew for a time period that includes the seventh year. He ruled that the obligation to observe the sabbatical year is on the farmer working the land, and not on the land itself. Even those who disagreed with this ruling nonetheless agree that an actual sale of the land to a non-Jew will permit it to be farmed, since the land is no longer the property of a Jewish farmer.

An additional reason to be lenient is that our current situation is one of "undue hardship." Given the precarious state of the agricultural settlements, not working the land would be truly life-threatening. In such cases, one may rely on a single opinion — that of the Rezah2 — who held that nowadays, without the Jubilee year, the sabbatical year is not even rabbinically ordained, but is only a pious custom.

Additionally, we may take into account the question regarding the correct count of the years of the Shemitah cycle. The Kaftor Vaferach3 testified that some farmers would observe the seventh year during one year, while others observed it during another. Even though the rabbis agreed to observe just one sabbatical year)and chose the opinion of Maimonides(, this is only a convention. The doubt still remains as to which year is truly the sabbatical year.

According to the land deeds in Palestine under the Ottoman Empire, all land in fact belongs to the regime, not the Jewish farmer. The farmer is only a "sharecropper of the king," allowed to keep 90% of his produce by law)and 60-70% in practice(.

Rav Kook also intimated that he had additional arguments to be lenient, but intentionally did not publicize them. He feared that, once institutionalized, the hetter would become too entrenched. The ultimate goal was not to circumvent the laws of the sabbatical year, but to allow the settlements to grow and prosper until they would be able to completely observe the sabbatical year in all of its details.

> *"On purpose, I did not organize everything in this matter to be fully explained, organized, and analyzed as it should be. Some justifications and cogent arguments I have omitted completely. All this was in order that the hetter should not become too accepted, but will always be considered a temporary measure)hora'at sha'ah(, something that was permitted grudgingly due to the needs of the time. But when these issues are analyzed in the way of true Torah scholarship... the prohibition would become too weakened — and I certainly did not desire that."*)pp. 348-349(

Eye to the Future

Many of the rabbis who opposed the hetter mechirah wrote that not observing the sabbatical year would in fact jeopardize the future of Jewish settlement in the Land of Israel, since the punishment for transgressing its laws is exile)see Avot 5:9(. While Rav Kook also looked forward to the day when the seventh year would be fully observed, he viewed the hetter as a stepping-stone that would allow the community to achieve that goal:

> *"We must recognize that we are obligated to strive with all of our strength to bring matters so that, in the end, the sabbatical year will be increasingly observed in all of its holiness in the Holy Land.... But how to arrive at this sacred goal? Which means should we use to attain it? This matter must be considered carefully.*
>
> *In my opinion, we need to arrive at our desired goal precisely by graduated efforts. Rabbi Chiya Rabbah described the overall redemption of Israel as beginning slowly, little by little — kim'a kim'a]Jerusalem Talmud, Berachot 1:2[. So too, the spiritual redemption of establishing the Land's holiness will advance in stages, step by step."*)p. 330(

One expression of this graduated approach is the distinction the hetter made between those agricultural activities that are prohibited Biblically and those prohibited rabbinically. *"We should be like one who saves his possessions from the fire,"* Rav Kook explained. *"Whatever is more precious and holier]i.e., Biblically-prohibited labor[must be rescued first."*

This distinction also provides a solution to the danger of punishment by exile for not observing the sabbatical year. Such a severe penalty could only apply to transgressing Biblically-ordained prohibitions. 4

The Hetter for Farmers and Consumers

What about those who did not wish to rely on the hetter mechirah? Here, Rav Kook distinguished between farmers and consumers.

Rav Kook was very supportive of farmers who did not wish to rely on the hetter. When he heard that the JCA was using the hetter to force farmers to work on the sabbatical year, he became acutely distressed and informed the JCA that the hetter would become invalid under such circumstances. Rav Kook also spoke of setting up a special fund to support these farmers.
On the other hand, Rav Kook was critical of consumers who chose to be stringent in the sabbatical year by buying produce only from non-Jewish farmers. One cannot take on stringencies at the expense of others:

> *"Certainly it is not proper to look for leniencies and loopholes by purchasing produce from non-Jews, in a situation when this will cause loss of income from Jewish farmers and undermine their livelihood. In general, in any situation where we desire to be strict for ourselves, it is correct to make certain that this stringency does not induce any negative repercussions of financial loss or disrepute for others."*)p. 258(

FOOTNOTES:

1 Rabbi Jacob Toledano)1697-1771(of Meknes, Morocco.

2 Rabbi Zerachiah HaLevi Gerondi)1125-1186(.

3 Rabbi Eshtori HaParchi)1282-1357(.

4 As Rabbi Aryeh Leib Gunzberg)1695-1785(wrote regarding the blessings recited before studying Torah*: "It is self-evident, that if this blessing was only of rabbinic origin, it would not warrant such a terrible punishment as forfeiting the Land"*)Sha'agat Aryeh sec. 24(.

https://www.ravkooktorah.org/BEHAR_65.htm

Behar: We Are What We Do Not Own (5778)

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

The late Maurice and Vivienne Wohl were one of the most remarkable couples I ever met. They were a study in contrasts. Maurice was quiet, introspective, reflective and reserved. Vivienne was outgoing and vivacious, a people person in the truest sense. They complemented one another perfectly: two halves of a whole.

What made them special, outwardly, was that they were givers on a monumental scale. In Israel, for example, they donated the 19-acre rose garden next to the Knesset and the striking Daniel Libeskind-designed cultural centre at Bar Ilan University. They endowed medical facilities in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, as well as at King's College and University College, London. They supported Jewish schools in Britain and yeshivot in Israel – and all this hardly touches the surface of their philanthropy.

What was really moving, though, was how they became a couple in the first place, because Vivienne was thirty years younger than Maurice. When they met, Maurice was in his late forties, a dedicated businessman seemingly destined for a life of bachelorhood. Vivienne, not yet 20, was the daughter of friends of Maurice who had asked whether she could work for him during a vacation.

One day, Maurice offered to take her for lunch. On their way to the restaurant, they passed a beggar in the street. Maurice gave him a coin, and walked on. Vivienne stopped and asked Maurice if he would be kind enough to give her in advance a substantial sum – she named the figure – from this week's wages. Maurice handed over the money. She then walked back and gave it all to the beggar. "Why did you do that?" asked Maurice. "Because what you gave him was not enough to make a change to his life. He needed something more."

When the week came to an end, Maurice said to Vivienne, "I am not going to give you your full wages this week, because you gave away part of the money as a mitzvah and I do not want to rob you of it." But it was then that he decided that he must marry her, because, as he told me shortly before he died, "Her heart was bigger than mine."

I tell this story because it illustrates a dimension of parshat Behar we often miss. Leviticus 25 deals with a problem that is as acute today as it was 33 centuries ago. It is about the inevitable inequalities that arise in every free market economy. Market economics is good at the creation of wealth but bad at its distribution. Whatever the starting point, inequalities emerge early on between the more and less successful, and they become more pronounced over time.]1[

Economic inequality leads to inequality of power, and the result is often the abuse of the weak by the strong. This is a constant refrain of the prophets. Amos speaks of those who *"sell the innocent for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes; who trample on the heads of the poor as on the dust of the ground, and deny justice to the oppressed"*)Amos 2:6-7(. Isaiah cries, *"Woe to those who make unjust laws and issue oppressive decrees … making widows their prey and robbing*

the fatherless")Is. 10:1-2(. Micah inveighs against people who *"covet fields and seize them, houses and take them away; they oppress householder and house, people and their inheritance"*)Micah 2:1-2(.

This is a problem for almost every society and age. What makes the Torah distinctive is that it refuses a one-dimensional answer to what is a genuinely complex problem. Equality is a value, but so too is freedom. Communism and socialism have been tried and failed; but the free market generates its discontents also. One principle that can be inferred from Tanach is that the market was made to serve human beings; human beings were not made to serve the market. The fundamental question is therefore: what best serves humanity under the sovereignty of God?

A careful reading of Behar reveals that the Torah's approach to this question operates at three completely different levels. One is political, a second is psychological, and the third is theological.

The first level is simple. Behar proposes two cycles of redistribution, Shemittah and Yovel, the seventh and fiftieth year. The intent here is to restore a level playing field through a combination of debt remission, liberation of slaves, and the return of ancestral land to its original owners. This is a way of redressing accumulated inequalities without constant intervention in the economy. That is the political dimension.

The psychological dimension is what the French revolutionaries called fraternity. Ten times the laws in Behar use the word "brother." "Do not wrong your brother." "If your brother becomes poor." "The nearest redeemer shall come and redeem what his brother has sold." This is sound evolutionary logic. We know from the work of W. D. Hamilton and others on kin selection that the most basic driver of altruism is the family. We make sacrifices most readily for those most closely related to us.

That, in no small measure, is why from the beginning of the Jewish story to today, Jews have thought of themselves as a single family, descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah. It is one thing to legislate altruism, through such institutions as the seventh and fiftieth year. It is another to frame a society in such a way as to make people feel bound together in an unbreakable bond of shared responsibility. Hence the narratives of Genesis, focused overwhelmingly on the people of Israel not as a nation but as a family. Law and narrative here go hand in hand. Because the entire Jewish people is a single vastly extended family, therefore we must help when one of our brothers or sisters becomes destitute. This is ethnicity in the service of morality.

Finally, though, and most profoundly comes the theological dimension. For it is here, in Lev. 25, that we hear with unparalleled lucidity what I believe to be the single most fundamental principle of biblical law. Listen carefully to these two passages, the first about land, the second about Hebrew slaves:

> *The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is Mine: you are strangers and sojourners with me.* Lev. 25:23
>
> *If your brother becomes poor and sells himself to you, you shall not work him as a slave …For they are My servants whom I brought out of the land of Egypt; they shall not be sold as slaves. You shall not rule over him ruthlessly but shall fear your God.* Lev. 25:39-43

The Torah is making a radical point. There is no such thing as absolute ownership. There is to be no freehold in the land of Israel because the land belongs ultimately to God. Nor may an Israelite own another Israelite because we all belong to God, and have done so ever since He brought our ancestors out of slavery in Egypt.]emphasis added[

It is this principle that alone makes sense of the Torah's narrative of the creation of the universe. **The Torah is not a book of science. It is a book of law.** That is what the word "Torah" means. It follows that the opening chapter of the Torah is not a scientific account but a legal one. It is not an answer to the question, *"How was the universe born?"* It is an answer to a different question entirely: *"By what right does God command human beings?"* The answer is: because He created the universe. Therefore He owns the universe. Therefore He is entitled to lay down the conditions on which He permits us

to inhabit the universe. This is the basis of all biblical law. God rules not by might but by right – the right of a creator vis-à-vis his creation.

Nowhere is this clearer than in parshat Behar, where it becomes the basis of legislation about land ownership and slavery. Jewish law rests on the principle that only God owns anything. What we possess, we do not own but merely hold in trust. That is why the concept of tzedek/tzedakah is untranslatable into English, because it means both justice and charity. In English, justice and charity are radically different. We do justice because we must; we give charity because we may. If I give you £1,000 because I owe it to you, that is justice. If I give you the same amount because I owe you nothing but I think you need it, that is charity. An act may be one or the other but not both.

In Judaism, by contrast, what we possess is not ours. It belongs to God. He has merely placed it in our safekeeping. We are looking after it on behalf of God. One of the conditions of that trust is that if we have more than we need, we should share it with those who have less than they need. That is tzedakah: justice and charity combined.

That was how Maurice and Vivienne Wohl lived their lives. God had given Maurice success, and he knew that the wealth he had accumulated was not really his at all. God had given it to him to look after, trusting that he would use it wisely to enhance the lives of others. Maurice, though, was honest enough to realise]1[that he was probably better at making money than giving it away, and that]2[if he did not give it away to people and causes that needed it, he was failing in his duty to God and his fellow humans. That is why, when he met Vivienne and saw how sensitively she understood the needs of others and how willing she was to make sacrifices for them, he knew he had to marry her. So, throughout their almost 40 years together, they used the blessings God had given them to bring blessings into other people's lives. It was a privilege to know them.

The larger truth of Parshat Behar is that you cannot create a just society by political measures alone)debt remission, restoration of ancestral property and so on(. There are psychological and theological dimensions that are also vital.

But at a simple personal level, it contains a genuinely life-changing idea. Think of what you posses not as something you own but as something you hold in trust for the benefit, not only of you and your family, but also of others. In life, ask not, "what can I gain?" But "what can I give?" You will travel more lightly and with greater joy. You will enhance the lives of others. You will feel that your life has been worthwhile. Hardly any of us can give on the scale of a Maurice or Vivienne Wohl, but when it comes to giving, scale does not matter. Be a blessing to others and you will find that life has been a blessing to you.

LIFE CHANGING IDEA

]1[In life, ask not, "what can I gain?" But "what can I give?"

]2[Be a blessing to others and you will find that life has been a blessing to you.

https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/behar/we-are-what-we-dont-own/ Because Likutei Torah and the Internet Parsha Sheet, both attached by E-mail or saved in my archives at PotomacTorah.org, normally include the two most recent Devrei Torah by Rabbi Sacks, I have selected an earlier Dvar. Footnotes are not available for this Dvar Torah.

Eat to Live or Live to Eat? Life Lessons From the Parshah -- Behar

By Yehoshua B. Gordon, z"l * © Chabad 2024

The Torah portion of Behar begins with the mitzvah of Shemitah, the Sabbatical year:

> *And the L-rd 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 L-rd. You may sow your field*

for six years, and for six years you may prune your vineyard, and gather in its produce, But in the seventh year, the land shall have a complete rest, a Sabbath to the L-rd; you shall not sow your field, nor shall you prune your vineyard.1

Noting that the words "on Mount Sinai" seem superfluous, Rashi asks, *"What particular relevance does the subject of Shemitah have to Mount Sinai? Weren't all the commandments given from Sinai?"* He explains that this choice of wording teaches us that just like Shemitah's general principles and details were all stated at Sinai, likewise, all of the commandments — even those that are only briefly mentioned in the Torah and whose details were conveyed by our rabbis in the Oral Law — were also stated by G d at Mount Sinai.

While indeed an important teaching, it begs the question: why specifically use the mitzvah of Shemitah to teach this lesson? Of all 613 commandments, why is this one the prototypical example?

Among the many explanations given for this is one that also clears up a seeming contradiction:

It appears that G d tells us, "When you come to Israel, the land must rest – Shemitah!"

Alright, as soon as we get to the land we will have a year of rest.

But, no! The next verse says, *"Plant! For six years, you will sow your field, prune your vineyards, and gather your harvest."*

Wait. Why didn't You say that first?

So, what comes first: working the land or letting it rest?

Benzion vs. Ivan

The answer to this question is best understood in the context of a beautiful story about the Fourth Rebbe, Rabbi Shmuel of Lubavitch, known as the Rebbe Maharash, whose birthday is often commemorated around the time of year when the portion of Behar is read.

When the Rebbe Maharash's two sons, Rabbi Shalom DovBer, known as "the Rashab")who later became the Fifth Rebbe(, and his brother Rabbi Zalman Aharon, known as "the Raza" were children, they once engaged in a heated conversation about the difference between one who lives a life of spirituality and one who lives a life of materialism.

Sitting nearby, the Rebbe Maharash overheard the discussion and decided he must instruct these two very special boys, one of whom was destined to grow up to be a Rebbe.

Calling them over, he asked them to summon Benzion, a simple Jew who worked in the Rebbe's home as a valet of sorts. When Benzion stood before him, the Rebbe Maharash asked, "Benzion, did you eat today?"

"Thank G d, I did," answered Benzion.

"Why do you eat?" asked the Rebbe.

"I eat so that I can live," came the reply.

"And why do you live?" asked the Rebbe.

"I live to serve G d," said Benzion, letting out a sigh, as if to express that maybe his service of G d was not as complete and sublime as it could be.

The Rebbe then called for Ivan, a non-Jewish handyman working in his courtyard.

“Ivan, did you eat today?” asked the Rebbe.

“Yes!” Ivan answered.

“And why do you eat?” asked the Rebbe.

“I need to eat so I can live,” Ivan responded.

“And why do you need to live?” asked the Rebbe.

“Life is all about enjoying a good drink of vodka and a good meal!” came the reply.

The Rebbe Maharash thanked Ivan. The lesson was clear: You can live like Benzion, who eats to live, and lives to serve G d, or you can live the life of Ivan, and merely eat so that you can eat)and drink(some more.

The Torah begins the portion of Behar by saying, “When you come into the Holy Land, your first order of business must be the Sabbatical year.”

What does the Sabbatical year look like? It’s a year where the land lies fallow. You don’t plant, you don’t reap, you don’t harvest; your field is open to the poor.

What do farmers do during that year? They spend their time studying Torah. It’s a once-in-seven-year opportunity to devote ourselves to G d, to have a spiritual year. It is a taste of the Messianic era.

This is similar to the weekly cycle, working six days and resting on Shabbat.

The question is: do we work six days so that we can rest on Shabbat? Or do we rest on Shabbat so that we can work for six days? Is the rest and spiritual bliss of Shabbat the ultimate goal, or is it the productivity of the work week, the act of building G d’s world?

A Seventh Spigot

I once heard a beautiful teaching on a related note from a dear friend, Nissim Katzin. He shared this teaching in the name of his illustrious father, Rabbi Shlomo Katzin, of blessed memory, a great rabbi who lived in Jerusalem many years ago.

If you tell a person that whatever he earns comes from G d, and that working harder or longer hours will not increase his income, he may argue, “That’s factually incorrect! If I work for 10 hours at $25 an hour, I will earn $250. If I work for another two hours, I will earn another $50. How can you say I’m not making more money?”

In truth, however, he would be wrong. Rabbi Katzin explained this idea using the analogy of the Russian-style samovar, the hot water urn often found in the synagogues of old. This urn had multiple spigots around it, allowing several people to use it at once.

Imagine one day that a fellow comes along and discovers that the urn is empty. “You know,” he says, “our urn has only six spigots. If we had added a seventh spigot, we would still have hot water!”

This guy would undoubtedly be called a fool.

The same is true of the Divine blessing of earning a living. G d determines how much we'll make each week. We can take our livelihood through six spigots—six days of the week—and have a seventh, which is a day of spiritual bliss, or we can choose to take it through seven spigots, and forego the spirituality. Either way, the amount we earn does not change.

Back to our question: what is our focus? Work so we can rest, or rest so we can work?

The answer, of course, is that the focus, the primary objective, must be the Sabbatical year, the spirituality, devoting ourselves to higher and more sublime matters.

How do we get to that seventh, sublime year? By working for the six preceding ones.

Divine Priorities

I recall a pivotal teaching that I had the privilege of hearing from the Rebbe. It was during a time when the topic of feminism and the emphasis on being a "career woman" were prevalent and heated, often at the expense of women who were homemakers and cared for their children, as they were looked down upon.

The Rebbe's message was clear: valuing one's career over raising a family is an erroneous misconception. In fact, the opposite is true. Why do we work? Why do we pursue careers? The purpose is so that we can marry and establish a family, to create a sacred life with a spouse, children, and grandchildren. That, fundamentally, is the essence of life: raising the next generation.

We work to support our families. Sometimes, both partners must work due to circumstances, not because work is paramount, but because family is. The moment we prioritize our careers over our families, however, we lose sight of everything meaningful.

My sister, Mrs. Chani Friedman, is married to the well-known Rabbi Manis Friedman, a famous author and speaker, whose lectures span the globe. Together, they are blessed with fourteen children, thank G d.

Addressing a group of quite militant feminists many years ago, Rabbi Friedman was challenged by someone in the audience who demanded that before he began his lecture, he must confess that his wife was merely a homemaker. "Actually," Rabbi Friedman gently corrected her, "my wife runs a home for unwanted children. Fourteen of them, to be precise." Deeply apologetic, the challenger expressed admiration for the rabbi's wife.

"It's true, the children are our children," Rabbi Friedman continued, "but we asked around, and no one else wants them!"

When entering the Land of Israel, is it about pursuing a career or nurturing your family? Is it about being a farmer or about living a spiritually elevated life?

In the words of the Rebbe Maharash, are you eating merely to eat more? Or are you eating so you can serve G d?

That is why the laws of Shemitah, the Sabbatical year, are chosen to impart the lesson that all of G d's commandments originate from Mount Sinai. From Shemitah we learn the proper prioritization of everything truly significant in our everyday lives.

Yes, we are farmers. Yes, we have careers. Yes, we have to work hard. Yet it's all about the greater purpose; it's about serving G d. It's about building a family and making G d's world a better and more G dly place.

May we merit to reach the ultimate Sabbatical year—the seventh millennium—the Ultimate Redemption, with the arrival of our righteous Moshiach, may it be speedily in our days. Amen.

FOOTNOTES:

1. Leviticus 25:1-5.

* Rabbi Yehoshua Gordon directed Chabad of the Valley in Tarzana, CA until his passing in 2016. Adapted by Rabbi Mottel Friedman from classes and sermons that Rabbi Gordon presented in Encino, CA and broadcast on Chabad.org. "Life Lessons from the Parshah" is a project of the Rabbi Joshua B. Gordon Living Legacy Fund, benefiting the 32 centers of Chabad of the Valley, published by Chabad of the Valley and Chabad.org.

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/6437424/jewish/Eat-to-Live-or-Live-to-Eat.htm

---

Behar: Living in a Spiritual House

by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky *

Living in a Spiritual House

> *When a man sells a residential house inside a walled city, its redemption may take place until the end of the year of its sale. Its redemption is a full year.*)Lev. 25:29(

The three fundamental human needs are food, clothing, and shelter. Food nourishes us from within, while clothing and shelter protect us from without.

Allegorically, spiritual food is the study of G-d's Torah, which nourishes our soul.

Clothing and shelter are the performance of G-d's commandments, which create spiritual "force fields" that protect us from the encroachment of materiality and other harmful spiritual influences.

Just as our physical clothing fits us closely, most commandments are closely "tailored" to us, serving as ways for us to express our unique spiritual personalities. In contrast, just as our homes do not fit us closely, there are some commandments that express parts of our soul of which we are not normally conscious. For example, we can only fulfill the commandment to leave forgotten sheaves for the poor if we forget some sheaves in the field; we cannot plan to fulfill this commandment.

Thus, when the opportunity to fulfill some commandment or do some good deed comes our way unexpectedly, we should treat it as a Divine gift, a fleeting glimpse into the inner goodness of our soul.

— from *Daily Wisdom 3*

May G-d show more and more great miracles in the Holy Land.

Gut Shabbos,

Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman
Kehot Publication Society

* Insights from the Rebbe.

Chapters of psalms to recite for Israel to prevail over Hamas and for the release of remaining hostages. Recite these psalms daily – to download:

https://mail.yahoo.com/d/folders/1/messages/AKMWqg80kU-LZSgctgRwuPHhxuo

Booklet form download:

https://mail.yahoo.com/d/folders/1/messages/AKMWqg80kU-LZSgctgRwuPHhxuo

---

To receive the complete D'Vrai Torah package weekly by E-mail, send your request to AfisherADS@Yahoo.com. The printed copies contain only a small portion of the D'Vrai Torah. Dedication opportunities available. Authors retain all copyright privileges for their sections.

Likutei Divrei Torah

Gleanings of Divrei Torah on Parashat Hashavuah via the Internet

Shabbat Shalom

Volume 30, Issue 32 **Shabbat Parashat Behar** **5784 B"H**

Covenant and Conversation
Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

The Economics of Liberty

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Torah's solution, set out in Behar, is a periodic restoration of people's fundamental liberties. Every seventh year, debts were to be released and Israelite slaves set free. After seven sabbatical cycles, the Jubilee year was to be a time when, with few exceptions, ancestral land returned to its original owners. The Liberty Bell in Philadelphia is engraved with the famous words of the Jubilee command, in the King James translation: "Proclaim liberty throughout all the land to all its inhabitants." Lev. 25:10

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

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

Next, it takes this entire system out of the hands of human legislators. It rests on two fundamental ideas about capital and labour. First, the land belongs to God: "And the land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is Mine. You are foreigners and visitors as far as I am concerned." Lev. 25:23

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

This means that personal and economic liberty are not open to political negotiation. They are inalienable, God-given rights. This is what lay

What Does Judaism Say About … Podcast with Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel. The week's topic is **Tzedaka – Much More than Jewish Charity** - Next week: Meaning of Bar Mitzvah
Search for "Nachum Amsel" on your podcast app or go to:
Apple: tinyurl.com/applejudaismsays
Spotify: tinyurl.com/spotifyjudaismsays

behind John F. Kennedy's reference in his 1961 Presidential Inaugural, to the "revolutionary beliefs for which our forebears fought," namely "the belief that the rights of man come not from the generosity of the state but from the hand of God."

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

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

[1] Thomas Picketty, Capital in the Twenty-First Century, translation: Arthur Goldhammer, Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014.
[2] http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2012/12/a-giant-statistical-round-up-of-the-income-inequality-crisis-in-16-charts/266074.
[3] http://www.theguardian.com/business/2014/jan/20/oxfam-85-richest-people-half-of-the-world.
[4] Isaiah Berlin, 'Two concepts of liberty,' in Four Essays on Liberty, Oxford University Press, 1969.
[5] This is the argument set out by Nobel Prize-winning economist Amartya Sen in his book, Development as Freedom, Oxford Paperbacks, 2001.
[6] See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Jewish_Nobel_laureates.

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Yeshivat Har Etzion: Virtual Bet Midrash

Sicha of Harav Aharon Lichtenstein, z"l
The Mitzva of Tzedaka

"And if your brother becomes impoverished and his means are low with you, you shall support him - [even] the stranger and the resident, so that he may live with you." (Vayikra 25:35)

"There are eight degrees of tzedaka (charity), in order of merit. The highest degree attainable is to support a Jew who has become impoverished by giving him a gift or a loan or going into partnership with him or finding him work, in order to strengthen him so that he will not need to ask from others. And of this it is said, 'And you shall support him - the stranger and the resident so that he may live with you.' In other words, you shall support him in order

that he will not fall into need." (Rambam, Hilkhot Matnot Aniyim 10:7)

The Rambam describes here the highest degree of tzedaka - helping someone who is in financial straits to make a living.

But why, we may ask, does this represents the ultimate level of tzedaka? On the words, "If your brother becomes impoverished and sells his property" (Vayikra 25:25), Rashi comments, "This teaches us that a person is not permitted to sell his field unless he is forced to do so out of financial necessity."

"Your impoverished brother", someone who is forced to sell his fields and his house, or to sell himself into servitude, is a downtrodden and pitiful victim, who is left with nothing and has reached the bottom of the ladder. Would it not seem that the highest level of tzedaka would be prevention of such a situation, ensuring that this degeneration never takes place, rather than the epitome of tzedaka as described by the Rambam?

Even leaving aside our query on the Rambam - who, after all, is dealing exclusively with the halakhic definition of the mitzva - our question remains. Our suggestion would seem to eliminate the whole basis for tzedaka, for if we prevent the problem of impoverishment, there is no one left needing tzedaka. Would the prevention of poverty in the first place not be regarded itself as tzedaka?

Let us attempt to answer this question by examining an example from a different sphere. The Gemara in Bava Metzia deals with the mitzva of returning lost property and rules that even in the case of loss of land, there exists the concept of lost property. What does the Gemara mean by this? Let us imagine that a river is overflowing its banks and threatens to engulf a field, and you prevent this by building a dike. Such a preventive measure is considered by the Gemara to constitute restoration of lost property - i.e., as a mitzva in itself.

Even if there is no clear connection between the prevention and the action itself, this does not undermine the worth of our efforts to prevent problematic situations. Such is the case, for example, in medicine. We certainly support the idea and practice of preventive medicine, despite the fact that by preventing illness we are also preventing the fulfillment of the mitzvot of healing and visiting the sick.

However, it is more complicated to carry out preventative action in the area of tzedaka. We are accustomed to feeling pity for someone who is impoverished, someone who has nothing, but not for someone who still owns property and is threatened by the prospect of financial loss. A person says to himself, "I'm sure it will all eventually work out for him, or someone else will come along and help him." Sometimes we are not even aware that someone is on the brink of financial disaster. Moreover, at times the potential victim is not a single individual but rather an entire community or an entire socio-economic stratum of the population.

In the past, the good of the general population - a thriving economic system - used to be perceived as a supreme value, even if in the process some harm would be caused to the weaker strata of the population, who would not be able to keep up with those stronger elements who would survive. Today we are witness to a certain degree of progress in this regard: we strive for equality and justice for all, and an economic system which will work for the good of those less capable as well.

This need to help the weaker elements of society requires a courageous individual who could stand at the head of such a system, someone with the ability to rise above political and sectarian considerations, someone with the ability to predict and foresee future events and to know how to prevent undesirable situations from coming about.

"We are obliged to be exceedingly careful in the mitzva of tzedaka - more than any other positive mitzva, because tzedaka is the sign of the descendants of Avraham Avinu, about whom it is written, 'For I know him that he will instruct his descendants... to do tzedaka.' And the throne of Israel will not be restored and the religion of truth will not arise except by means of tzedaka, as it is written, '... with tzedaka shall you be established.'" (Rambam ibid. 10:1)

The completion and perfection of the religion of truth, according to the Rambam, are to be found principally in tzedaka, in the creation of an economic system which aims towards equality and justice, which takes care of all segments of the nation. "And Israel is redeemed only by tzedaka, as it is written, 'Tzion will be redeemed with justice and her inhabitants with tzedaka.'" (Rambam ibid.)

(Originally delivered at Seuda Shelishit, Shabbat Parashat Behar 5752. Summarized by Danny Orenbuch Translated by Kaeren Fish.)

Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand

A Time for Belief and a Time for Heresy

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

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

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

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

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

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

(I will mention as an historical aside, in the not-too-distant Jewish history there was something known as the 'Haskalah movement'. These were people who felt that

parts of the Jewish religion were superstitious and outdated. They felt it was necessary to practice religion "with sechel". That's why the movement was called "the Haskalah.")

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

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

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

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

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

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

Confluence of Events Is the Almighty Speaking to Us

Another Medrash on the above-quoted Pasuk [Vayikra 25:25] – "When your brother becomes poor, you shall support him" [Ki Yamuch Achicha…] – links this pasuk with a pasuk in Mishlei [22:2] – "The rich and the poor meet, Hashem puts them all together." What does this pasuk in Mishlei have to do with the pasuk "Ki Yamuch Achicha"?

I wish to explain this Medrash with a true story.

In Ger, Poland, the custom used to be that when a Gerrer Chosid could not pay his rent and his landlord wanted to evict him and put him on the street, the Gerrer community would get together and raise the money to pay off the fellow's rent. The tenant would remain safe in his house and would not be put out on the street.

It once happened that a Gerrer Chosid was a tenant of another Gerrer Chosid. The tenant could not pay his rent and the landlord threatened to evict him. The tenant came to the Gerrer Rebbe and complained, "My landlord – a Gerrer Chosid – wants to put me on the street." The Rebbe told the tenant to send the landlord to him. The Gerrer Chosid landlord came before the Rebbe, and the Rebbe told him: "Don't put this fellow on the street, swallow your loss!"

The landlord Chosid complained to the Rebbe. He said, "I don't understand. If the landlord is not a Gerrer Chosid then the whole community assumes the debt and the whole Kehilla pays for it. Now that I happen to be the landlord and I happen to be a Gerrer Chosid, why should I have to assume the entire problem? Why am I different from a Vizhnitzer Chosid or some other Chosid, or a non-Chosid who wants to evict his tenant? Why am I penalized just because I happen to be a Gerrer Chosid?

The Rebbe said, "That is right. If the Ribono shel Olam put you in that position, then He is telling you 'This is your problem.' It is no coincidence that he is a Gerrer Chosid and you are a Gerrer Chosid and it happens to fall in your lap. A mitzvah that falls into your lap is a sign from Heaven that YOU need to take care of it." Therefore, the Rebbe told the landlord "You need to assume the entire burden because that is what the Ribono shel Olam wants."

That is how the Gerrer Rebbe explained the Medrash linking the pasuk in Behar with the pasuk in Mishlei. "When your brother becomes poor then you shall support him." The Medrash links this with the pasuk "The rich man and the poor man met, Hashem did this for you." This confluence of events was set up by the Almighty. For whatever reason, the Ribono shel Olam is giving the rich man this specific mitzvah. Therefore, he should not try to deny what Providence is demanding of him.

The Chazon Ish writes in his sefer Emunah u'Bitachon that today we have no prophets. We are living in a time of Hester Panim (the 'Divine Face' is hidden). Ruach haKodesh is also not very widespread. But, says the Chazon Ish, the Ribono shel Olam still talks to us. If something happens in a person's life—a confluence of events—the Ribono shel Olam is telling you something. This is no coincidence. That is how the Almighty deals with us in our time. He does not have Nevi'im speak to us and most of us do not have Ruach HaKodesh, so we do not know what is going on. But events—how things just happen to fall into place—represent the Ribono shel Olam talking to us in our day and age. This is what the pasuk in Mishlei is saying: When the poor person and rich man happen to 'meet'—this was the action of Hashem.

Therefore, "When you brother becomes poor" – the Gerrer Rebbe told his Chosid: If this fellow fell into your lap, it is a Sign from Heaven that it is your responsibility to take care of him. This is your mitzvah, this is what the Ribono shel Olam wants, and it will be good for you in the end.

Dvar Torah
Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

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

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

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

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

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

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

what is right because it is right!

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

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

Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

The Best Way to Provide Support

Rabbi Shaul Vider

I am fortunate to be presented with the opportunity to write about one of the central themes of Parshat Behar. Although this portion is a relatively short one, it still contains a few unique topics like the mitzvah of Shmitta (the land's Sabbatical year), which is taking place in the Land of Israel right now! But for me, the most central verse in this parsha is: "And if your brother should become impoverished, and the hand he has with you shall fall; then you shall support him: as a stranger and a settler shall he live with you." (Vayikra 25:35)

In his commentary on the above verse, the Ramban connects between the commandment "you shall support him" and that of "… so that your brother may live with you" (ibid. 25:36) by referring to the notion of piku'ach nefesh – saving a life, one of the most important values in Judaism.

"The words 'so that your brother may live with you' teach us that there is a positive commandment to sustain him. In fact, the mitzvah of piku'ach nefesh is learned from these very words, as is written in Midrash Torat Kohanim (portion 5:3) on the verse 'so that your brother may live with you'."

In other words, the Ramban draws a line between the verse in our portion and the verse from which the mitzvah of piku'ach nefesh is initially learned (Vayikra 18:5): "You shall therefore keep My statutes, and Mine ordinances, which if a man does, he shall live by them: I am the Lord."

The Talmud[1] relates the words of the Amoraic scholar Shmuel, who said: "He shall live by them and he shall not die by them." The Ramban, in turn, takes the word vechai ("and he shall live"), which appears in both the verse that teaches us about the mitzvah of piku'ach nefesh (vechai bahem), as well as in the verse in our own portion, which appears in the commandment to support one's brother who has fallen into poverty (vechai achicha imach) – and draws an analogy between the two cases, based on the common word: vechai.

It is the Ramban's contention that supporting one who has fallen into poverty, is, in essence, an act of saving a life because giving support to such a person is the practical expression of "the positive commandment to sustain him", which is a notch higher than upholding him.

The Ramban interprets support as the physical maintenance of the needy, providing him with sufficient means to allow him to live reasonably. However, such support cannot come at the expense of the supporter's wellbeing.

Moving forward in time from the exegesis of the Middle Ages to that of modern times, we come across the fascinating words of Rabbi Shimshon Rafael Hirsch[2] on the verse in question. Rabbi Hirsch starts with a meticulous analysis of the words "umata yado imach" (literally: "and his hand shall fall from you"), which prove to be significant in understanding the commandment of "you shall support him".

Thus says Rabbi Hirsch: "'Umata yado imach' – in no other place do we find the root of mot (fall, fail) in relation to hand; it always comes in reference to foot or to a person. If the verse [in our portion] had said umat imecha ["and he shall fall from you"] or, alternatively, umata raglo imecha ["his foot shall fall from you"], then the meaning would clearly be a description of the initial fall or failure to provide for himself. In other words, the verse would have conveyed that his very existence is in danger, and so the purpose of any help would be to preserve this man's existence. But the verse says 'umata yado imach'. This particular phrasing expresses a weakening of activity [bold in the original], the state of being unable to enhance productivity."

It seems obvious to Rabbi Hirsch that this verse should not be read as a realistic description depicting the first stage of a fall which is soon to lead to dire economic difficulties. Rather, the collocation of the word "fall" [mat] and "hand" [yad] denotes a changed state; what was once robust productivity has now become weak and unstable.

For this very reason, Rabbi Hirsch goes on to say: "One must not wait for a complete economic downfall in order to give support. But even in the case of some degree of weakening, when a person lacks the resources to fully provide for himself as he was once able to, and only requires a little help in order to continue providing for himself and becoming fully independent – it is then that you must "support him" – vehechezakta bo – make sure he 'remains strong' [as is written in the Sifra]. So long as he keeps falling, he cannot be termed 'strong'." [Rabbi Hirsch continues to quote further from the Sifra, and then goes on to say]: "Is one obligated to keep on helping him even if such help "causes him to go astray" – i.e., leads the supported person to become lazy, relying on the fact that he will be continuously supported? The answer to that lies in the word [from the verse] imecha ["with you"]: he must be helped until he is one with you, as independent as you. In other words, it is your responsibility to support him in such manner that he is "with you"- in morals as well."

Rabbi Hirsch tones down the case presented by the Torah to some degree – "And if your brother should become impoverished, and the hand he has with you shall fall" – and describes a reality in which the impoverished person is not somebody who is on the brink of an economic downfall or one who has suddenly become a pauper.

Rather, we are talking of one who has always been able to support himself and his family, but at a given point in time "he lacks the resources to fully provide for himself." This explanation does not offer a precise definition for what it means to be lacking the resources. Is this a case of a physical inability to provide for oneself induced by external factors (the person has lost his job; the crops failed due to a plague or pest; COVID); or perhaps the problem is a subjective one (the person is uneducated; there is a physical problem; tiredness; mental fatigue)?

Despite the unclarity in this regard, Rabbi Hirsch's message still sounds loud and clear: society may not claim that it tried to help the person once, and henceforth the person is on his own. We have a moral obligation to help the individual regain his previous status, until such time when he and the society in which he lives are once again on equal footing.

Rabbi Hirsch explains what is meant by "he lacks the resources" later in his commentary, with reference to the next verse in the portion (Vayikra 25:36), and also expounds on his social and ethical doctrine in this matter.

"Any advancement made in his [one who needs help] life or any mission fulfilled by him are also connected to you, your life, your advancement. You do not live for yourself alone; you do not procure anything for your benefit only. Truth be told, you must first take care of yourself, which means you must procure the means that will enable you to fulfill your life's calling. However, this [helping others] is also a part of that calling. Thus, you must also procure the means that will enable you to help your brother. Since you and he belong to one and the same society, it is your obligation to help him fulfill his own calling. His life is intertwined with your life. And it is this that makes you a nation. Neither social coercion nor taxes imposed by any

human nor the colossal fear of revolutions – none of these unite you and turn you into a nation. Only the recognition that one is bound by the word of God, and that the fear of God guides our every step – this is what connects us and turns us into a nation. This is the strongest knot; this is the eternal connection expressed by mutual assistance and kindness…"

It is my understanding that in his explanation of the term – "the means that will enable you" – Rabbi Hirsch is mainly referring to a way of life which includes formal education and professional training that enable one to work and provide for oneself sufficiently.

The interpretation Rabbi Hirsch gives to the concept of mutual assistance is rather revolutionary. In his opinion, mutual assistance means helping the other person find his own life path; enabling him to advance and learn a profession that will make him self-sufficient. Only this type of mutual assistance can create a worthy society.

There is no point in providing one-time financial assistance or offering a superficial solution or giving temporary aid. This is not what is termed mutual assistance; rather, this is a patronizing attitude which can only serve to perpetuate dependency.

Instead, one must try and break this vicious circle of economic dependence by finding a core solution, even if it takes longer to implement.

It seems to me that the centers for vocational training, which were quite common in Israel in the 1970s and 1980s, are the practical implementation of Rabbi Hirsch's ethical doctrine and his vision for an ideal Jewish society.

May we be so worthy as to fulfill our life's calling, which includes not only our own personal aspirations, but also that of our Jewish brethren who live with us.

As already mentioned above, in the scope of this little piece, I don't feel I am able to offer practical solutions for the questions posed. My main grief is that some of the laws we have today have been displaced and uprooted, in that they are perceived as absolute prohibitions imposed upon us, and, as such, have lost their immanent beauty. Nevertheless, I continue to hope and pray that we find the proper way to keep observing the customs and traditions of our fathers, while infusing them with new life.

[1] Babylonian Talmud, tractate of Yoma, 85:2.
[2] The Rabbinical leader of German orthodoxy in the 19th century (1808-1888).

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

Rabbi Zvi Sobolofsky - Yom Kippur of Yovel: A Uniquely Opportune Time

The first day of Tishrei begins the new year for many halachos. Yet, the laws of Yovel that appear in Parshas Behar do not begin until Yom Kippur of the Yovel year. Why is the beginning of Yovel delayed from Rosh Hashannah until Yom Kippur?

Many of the halachos that apply during Yovel are difficult to understand. A person who sold his land that was received as an inheritance has the land returned to him at the beginning of Yovel. According to the regular halachos that govern dinei mammonos (monetary law) this is incomprehensible. Once a sale of property occurs, it can never be revoked without the consent of the buyer. Yovel also frees slaves who previously had agreed to remain as slaves. After six years of servitude, the slave requested to remain in this state forever. Yet, when Yovel comes the owner is forced to free even such a slave. Following regular monetary practices, once a decision was willingly made to sell oneself to another, one should not be able to revoke that choice. Why is it that Yovel supersedes the standard rules of dinei mammonos?

Chazal teach us that when Hashem created the world, the theoretical plan was to create a world following the strict rules of justice. The name of Hashem that appears in the beginning of Sefer Bereishis is "Elokim" which is synonymous with middas ha'din – the attribute of justice. Ultimately, Hashem merged in middas ha'rachamim – the attribute of mercy – and created the world in such a manner because a world built on justice alone cannot endure. The description of creation, therefore, describes Hashem as "Hashem Ha'elokim" – the fusion of middas ha'din and middas ha'rachamim. In the musaf of Rosh Hashannah we say, "Ha'yom haras olam – today marks the creation of the world." As such, the reenactment of ma'aseh Bereishis begins with a time of justice. Rosh Hashanah is such a day. However, just as the original creation necessitated incorporating mercy and compasion to enable the world to exist, every year we relive that tempering of justice by mercy via our Yom Kippur observance. The very gift of teshuva which is the primary theme of Yom Kippur emanates from middas ha'rachamim. According to strict justice, there should be no way to rectify a sin. Yet, on the day of mercy, teshuva becomes a possibility.

In a world that would be governed by strict justice, there would be no place for Yovel. Fields that were sold and servitude that had been willingly entered into would remain so for eternity. Yet Hashem in His great mercy decreed that His world would also follow the dictates of compassions. Previous landowners who, sadly, had to sell their ancestral inheritance are miraculously given a second chance. Former slaves are granted their freedom even if they don't deserve it.

Hashem expects of us to act in a way that emulates His attribute of mercy. There is no more appropriate time to display middas ha'rachamim to our fellow man than on Yom Kippur. Rosh Hashanah as a day of justice is not the opportune time for the beginning of Yovel. When Yom Kippur arrives and we look to Hashem for mercy and compassion, the best way to attain this mercy is by showing mercy to others. We live in a time when Yovel does not apply for technical, halachik reasons. However, the lessons of Yovel, i.e. the need to show compassion to others and enable others to rectify previous errors, is a message that is a timeless one.

Torah.Org Dvar Torah
by Rabbi Label Lam

The Fire Within

The fire shall always be burning on the Altar; It shall never go out. (Vayikra 6:)

It's Log B'Omer and everyone is seeking out a bonfire. What's the attraction? What's the lure? What's the big deal? I hope that doesn't sound too irreverent, but it may be worth the while to plumb the depths of this peculiar national phenomena.

We all know that Log B'Omer is the Yahrzeit of the Tanna, Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai. He was one of the five students through whom Rabbi Akiva was able to build back what was tragically lost when 24,000 of his students perished. Rabbi Shimon is also the repository for and the main transmitter of the Zohar/ Kabbalah. Why is that relevant? I don't know if I can explain the Zohar but I know that I am not qualified to explain either.

This may be the height of spiritual temerity but I am going to try a little bit in a language and a way that makes sense to me and may make sense to others as well.

Zohar offers the deepest look at life. We may scan, let us say, a country scene and observe trees and birds and people, rocks, and clouds and ponds, but there is more there than meets the eye, and we know it. I held up for a class the other day a picture of the periodic table of elements. I declared confidently, "You and me and everything about us in this universe consists of what's found here and there is nothing else." There is no doubt that this is 100% true. These are the building blocks, the chemistry set that makes up everything in the world.

Then I held up a copy of the 22 letters of the Hebrew Aleph-Beis, the Holy Language, as they appear in a Sefer Torah. I confidently declared again, "You and me and everything about us in this universe consists of what's found here and there is nothing else."

Now, that statement requires an explanation, a support. I followed up with a quote from Sefer Yetzira, one of the oldest and most mystical books in existence, that may have been authored by Avraham Avinu.

It says, Twenty-two Foundation Letters: He engraved them. He carved them. He permuted them. He weighed them. He transformed them.

And with them, He depicted all that was formed and all that would be formed." It sounds an awful lot like we are talking about the periodic table of elements, doesn't it.

Now, how can we easily show that this world is really a model of incredible oneness? Every atom listed on that periodic table of elements, although different and many ways, appearance, size, function, you name it, is really made up of the exact same stuff. The nucleus may be composed of more or less protons and neutrons, and electrons are orbiting at various valences around but it is all a combo platter of the same ingredients. If you happen to split open any of those magical machines, whether it's the lightest like hydrogen or the heaviest like plutonium then out will come rushing oceans of sublime energy, a giant fire.

The mystical tradition tells us that HASHEM created the world with the 22 letters of the Hebrew Aleph-Beis and in those letters is invested oceans of endlessly sublime "energy", fire! Now that country scene is beginning to look alive in a new and different light entirely. A fire is a spontaneous revelation of the profound energy embedded in what seems like inert matter. From a few sticks of dead wood, a huge fire is born.

One of my teachers told us that "life is a self-portrait." What we see and experience outside of ourselves tells us more about what is going on, on the inside. So, while we observe and study a bonfire and notice how the fire is dancing and raging and reaching with desperation to go back to its source, it ignites, and arouses, and reveals something essential and holy about us.

Since HASHEM breathed the breath of life into the nostrils of man, there, buried deep inside, waiting to be revealed, and it is on Log B'Omer, is the essential unifying point of the Jewish People as a Nation of HASHEM and our unique connection through the fire within.

Rabbi Dr. Norman J. Lamm's Derashot Ledorot

In Praise of Impracticality

Our Sidra opens with the words וידבר ה' אל משה בהר סיני לאמר, "And the Lord spoke to Moses at Mt. Sinai, Saying..." What follows this introduction is a portion that deals with the laws of the .the Sabbatical year, when the land must lie fallow and all debts be remitted ,שמיטה

The Rabbis were intrigued by one word in that opening verse: the word בהר, on the mountain. Why this special reference to Mt. Sinai at this time? The question as they phrased it has come over into Yiddish and Hebrew as an idiomatic way of saying, מה ענין שמיטה אצל הר סיני, "what does one thing have to do with the other?" Thus, what connection is there between the sabbatical laws and Mt. Sinai? Were not all the laws and commandments enunciated at Mt. Sinai? Why then this special mention of Shemittah in association with Mt. Sinai?

Rashi quotes the answer provided by the Rabbis. Permit me, however, to offer an alternative answer: although Judaism is action-geared, oriented to the improvement of man and society; although it has a high moral quotient; although it addresses itself to the very real problems of imperfect man and suffering society; although, in contrast to certain other religions, it is more this-worldly; nevertheless, this concern with the real and the immediate and the empirical has a limit. Not everything in Judaism has to be as practical as an American businessman's profit-and-loss sheet or as "relevant" as the social activists and the radicals would like it to be. Judaism may not be ancient history; but neither is it journalism.

And this we see from the piquant fact that the laws of Shemittah were given specifically at Mt. Sinai. Laws known as מצוות התלויות בארץ, commandments whose fulfillment is dependent upon the Land of Israel, were given to the people of Israel before they ever arrived in ארץ ישראל, the Land of Israel! Agriculture laws were now given, in all their details, to a nomadic tribe without farms, without roots in the soil. Consider what the laws of shemittah sounded like to our grandparents as they surrounded Mt. Sinai, that bare desert mountain. They must have appeared weird, irrelevant, out of place, impertinent.

And yet, what was true of shemittah at Mt. Sinai is true of all the commandments at all times. They may seem hopelessly impractical, untimely, and irrelevant to the cold-eyed and hard-headed man, and yet they are the Law of the Lord, obligatory upon Jews at all times and all places.

Indeed, there is hardly anything as irrelevant as the piddling relevancy of the coldly practical man. Show me the man who sees only what is before his eyes, and I will show you a man who cannot see beyond his nose!

What does this praise of the impractical teach us?

First, it tells us simply that there are things that are of value in and of themselves, not only because they are instrumental or lead to other things. Thus, some of the commandments may restrain man's destructiveness. Others may lead him to improve society or his own soul or help the disadvantaged. But some are valuable simply because they were commanded by God. No other reason is necessary.

The same is true of knowledge. There are some kinds of knowledge which may lead to invention, and enhance the health of man and his convenience. But science is more than technology. There is also such a thing as knowledge for its own sake, knowledge acquired in order to satisfy the natural Intellectual curiosity of man.

A week ago, Apollo 16 returned from its trip to the moon. Except for those Americans who are so benumbed by the sensational that after the first time a thing is done it becomes a dreadful bore, the exploits of the astronauts kept the world enraptured. And yet consider what a monumental irrelevance the whole project is! The government spends millions of dollars, some of the brightest men in the world donate their talents, three men risk their lives -- all in order to study the structure of remote rocks so that we might formulate a theory of when the moon was created and how old it is. So what?, one might ask. And the answer is: so everything!

Yes, there may be legitimate questions about the priorities in our national budget. That is not now our concern. But without doubt, knowledge for its own sake must not be deprecated. The real point, to a small man, sometimes appears to be beside the point.

And the same is true in Judaism. There is the study of Torah for the sake of performance of the mitzvot, or the sake of cohesion of the community, or the sake of raising the level of Jewish observance. But the highest concept of Torah study remains תורה לשמה, Torah for its own sake. Here too, there may be a question of priorities in determining the subject matter of Torah. But there is no denying the ultimate and high value of תורה לשמה, of study for its own sake.

It was the Jerusalem Talmud (Hag. 2:1) that attributed to the most notorious heretic in Jewish history the opposition to "other-worldly study of Torah." Elisha ben Abuya, known as אחר ("the other one"), is said to have stormed into a classroom, rudely interrupted the teacher, and shouted at the students: "what are you doing here? Why are you wasting your time in such irrelevant material as Torah? You, you must be a builder; you must be a carpenter; you ought to become a fisherman, and you should be a tailor. Do something useful in your lives!" The great heretic was an eminently practical man...

Of course, I do not mean to be cute by espousing impracticality and advocating irrelevance. Total irrelevance is deadening to the spirit and results in what philosophers call solipsism; divorce from the outside world and experience and the introversion into oneself; and impracticality can become nothing but a semantic excuse for inefficiency and incompetence. What I do mean is that relevance is a good, but not the only one or even the most important one. And while practicality is necessary for the execution of ideals, dreams and visions need not be pre-restrained in the Procrustean bed of a mercantile mentality.

The second point is that sometimes the apparently remote does contain highly significant and very real dimensions, but it is our narrow vision and restricted understanding that does not allow us to expose these obscure insights. Kashrut sometimes is ridiculed in this modern age because it appears superfluous when we consider the sanitary facilities we possess. And yet, those who understand kashrut realize that it has so little to do with sanitation and has so very much to say about reverence for life — and this, in a world in which life is losing its value, in which the approval of abortions is moving into the encouragement of euthenasia. כלאים and שעטנז, the prohibitions against mixing various garments or seeds or animals, has always been held up as a paradigm of non-rational commandments, and yet today we realize how much they have to say to us about ecology and the preservation of the separate species of the universe. The Sabbath laws are meant not only to give us a day of rest, because Sunday in modern America can accomplish

that as well. It does tell us that we are not the by-products of a cosmic accident, that we owe our existence to God, and must therefore curb our insufferable pride and collective arrogance.

So, these and many other such illustrations remind us of the need to search beneath the surface of Judaism for teachings that are eminently pertinent.

Third, we must be future-oriented. We must have faith that what is genuinely irrelevant now may, some day, become most relevant and meaningful as a result of our ability to carry on heroically despite present irrelevance and impracticality. What today seems visionary may prove indispensable to tomorrow's very real need.

The Rabbis were fond of saying: דברי תורה עניים במקום אחד ועשירים במקום אחר, the words of Torah and the Sages are "poor" in one place and "rich" in another. By this they meant to say, that sometimes the text of Torah will seem utterly narrow and superficial, teaching very little indeed. It is only when we compare it with another text, in another context, that we can appreciate how genuinely deep and insightful it really is. I would like to paraphrase that passage, switching from It sometimes happens that the words of .דברי תורה עניים בזמן אחד ועשירים בזמן אחר :thus ,זמן to מקום Torah in one epoch may seem to be thin and insignificant; it is only later, at another time, that the same words stand revealed as possessing unspeakable richness of insight and teaching.

Take as the most striking example: the hope for Jerusalem, whose fifth anniversary of liberation we celebrate later this week.

If we have the privilege to commemorate the reunion of people and city, of Israel and Jerusalem, we must acknowledge our debt to a hundred generations of Jews and Jewesses who since the year 70 have been wild dreamers, impractical idealists, possessed of visions impossible of execution; Jews who turned to Jerusalem three times a day in prayer; who when they ate bread thanked God for bread -- and for Jerusalem; who mentioned Jerusalem when they fasted and when they feasted; who brought little packets of dust of Jerusalem during their lifetime in order to take it along with them in their coffins on their long journey to eternity; who arose at midnight for תקון חצות, to lament over Jerusalem, and at every happy occasion promised to return there.

If we live in Jerusalem today - it is because of those unsophisticated visionaries who wanted at least to die in it.

If we can visit Jerusalem this year — it is thanks to those other-worldly dreamers who sang out .at least let us be there next year ,לשנה הבאה בירושלים

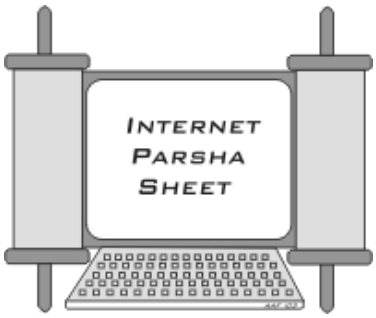
If we can happily laugh — אז ימלא שחוק פינו — it is in large measure the work of those who did not realize how irrelevant they were, how impossible their dreams were, and who prayed to return there, thus daring and braving and risking the derisive laughter of legions of practical men who simply knew that we were finished, and that Jerusalem would never become a Jewish city again.

It is only because of generations of bridegrooms who concluded every wedding by stamping on a glass, its shattering fragments recalling the חרבן ירושלים (the destruction of Jerusalem), and proclaiming אם אשכחך ירושלים תשכח ימיני ("If I forget thee 0 Jerusalem, let my right hand fail") that today we can defy the whole world, East and West, and say: Never again shall you separate us from Jerusalem, not Capitalists and not Communists, not Moslems and not even Christians who have lately discovered that Jerusalem is important to them.

Jerusalem Day is a tribute to this special Jewish brand of impracticality and irrelevance.

So, מה ענין שמיטה אצל הר סיני, what is the association-or connection between the sabbatical laws and Mt. Sinai? They come to tell us first, that not everything need be relevant; second, that not everything that appears irrelevant really is; and third, that what is irrelevant today may be the most important fact of life tomorrow.

This lesson too is part of the heritage of Sinai. Indeed, without it all the rest is in jeopardy. With it, all the rest will prevail too. במהרה בימנו אמן



BS"D

To: parsha@groups.io
From: Chaim Shulman <cshulman@gmail.com>
& Allen Klein <allen.klein@gmail.com>

INTERNET PARSHA SHEET
ON **EMOR** - 5784

parsha@groups.io / www.parsha.net - in our 29th 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.

On **Friday night** we count the **25th day of the omer**.

From: TorahWeb <torahweb@torahweb.org>
Date: May 16, 2024, 8:45 PM
Subject: **Rabbi Aryeh Lebowitz - The Avodah of Feeling**

In the aftermath of יום הזכרון and יום העמצאות, it is worthwhile to contemplate the emotions of this year, and specifically the price we have paid as a people to defend our land. Before we arrive at an approach let us discuss two questions:

When describing the prohibition of אותו ואת בנו the Torah says, " לא תשחטו ביום אחד - you shall not slaughter them on one day." It seems, though, that there is an inappropriate use of the plural form in תשחטו. The איסור is for any single individual to shecht אותו ואת בנו ביום אחד. Why, then, would the Torah speak to the plural rather than the singular?

The בעל המאור at the very end of מס' פסחים asks why we do not say a שהחיינו on the מצוה of ספירת העומר. After all, we say שהחיינו over most other time-specific mitzvos, like שופר, לולב and מגילה! The בעל המאור suggests that there is no שהחיינו because without a קרבן עומר, we are unable to perform the mitzvah in its complete sense, and that diminishes from the שמחה of the מצוה. However, Rav Soloveitchik points out, this answer only works if we assume that ספירת העומר בזמן הזה is only a מצוה מדרבנן and is connected to the קרבן עומר. The רמב"ם, though, understands that ספירת העומר is not bound to the קרבן עומר and is still a מצוה דאורייתא nowadays. How, then, would the רמב"ם explain why we don't recite a שהחיינו on ספירת העומר?

Often, the עבודה for us is to feel pain. There are undoubtedly times for introspection and times for self-improvement, but before any of that, there is an avodah to feel. The greater the tragedy the longer it takes to absorb and speak about it in a meaningful way. Perhaps that is why after the holocaust nobody spoke about it for decades.

Moreinu v'Rabbeinu Rav Mayer Twersky shlit"a made this point in the context of understanding the Rambam in the third perek of הלכות תשובה. The Rambam lists those who do not have a חלק בעולם הבא, and among the list are those who are פורש מדרכי הציבור. In הלכה י"א the רמב"ם writes that this does not mean that a person has violated עבירות. To the contrary, " אף על פי שלא עבר עבירות", one is considered to be פורש מדרכי הציבור if he lives his life outside of the context of the rest of כלל ישראל. In the Rambam's terminology, if he is, "לא נכנס בצרתן". Our עבודה when thinking about the families of our fallen soldiers is simply to be נכנס בצרתן. Rav Twersky pointed out that some Jews do this viscerally. There is no thought process or program to it. They just feel. Those of us who have not yet achieved that מדרגה are supposed to be מתבונן, to contemplate and focus on the tragedy, until we get to the point that we are נכנס בצרתן. That is our עבודה - to feel the pain of others.

We are familiar with the הלכה that when we are מנחם אבל we do not initiate conversation. This is fascinating because Chazal derive from the passuk, "והאנק דום" that silence is an indication of mourning, which suggests that the comforter is also in mourning. Essentially, we sit there silently to express to the mourner that we too are mourning - עמו אנכי בצרה - and through that shared experience of mourning the אבל finds a small amount of comfort.

In the context of a different tragedy, my brother, Rav Avi Lebowitz shlit"a, pointed out that we cannot yet fully internalize the magnitude of the tragedy and react properly to it for another reason - the tragedy isn't over. There are still so many people in hospitals; there are still so many families that don't know if their father/brother/son will ever return home, and if so, will he ever return to normal life. There are so many whose lives have been altered in a way that one cannot recuperate from. It is just too early and too raw. As my friend Rav Warren Cinnamon said, sometimes we need a little נשמע before נעשה.

Rav Soloveitchik explains that we do not recite a שהחיינו on ספירת העומר because שהחיינו is recited when we have arrived at the destination - והגיענו לזמן הזה. The very nature of ספירת העומר is such that we are making it clear that we have not yet arrived at the destination, rather we are counting toward the destination. There is a process we must go through, and we can't skip steps. In recent years we have been enjoying access to the very best of our homeland, seeing unprecedented growth both in ruchniyus and gashmiyus, feeling that we are at the doorstep of the final geulah. But Hashem told us that there is no שהחיינו during ספירה - we aren't there yet. We haven't arrived at the destination.

Rav Zalman Sorotzkin points out in his אזנים לתורה that the גמרא בחולין דף פ"ב derives from the phrase לא תשחטו in the context of אותו ואת בנו, that, " מלמד שאם שחט ראובן את האם ואחר כך שחט שמעון את הבן והתרו בו לוקה" - if Reuven shechts the mother animal and then Shimon shechts the offspring after being warned not to do so, Shimon receives lashes. Imagine two men - Reuven and Shimon - that are not brothers and have never even met each other. They don't even live in the same city. Shimon has this beautiful animal to shecht and it promises to provide his family with a delicious veal dinner. Yet, because Reuven, who he doesn't even know, has shechted that animal's mother, a normal neutral and benign action, he has generated a potential איסור דאורייתא for Shimon. Reuven has impacted Shimon's avodas Hashem and forced Shimon to modify his behavior. This highlights, Rav Sorotzkin says, that the actions and circumstances of one Jew impact every Jew.

Rav Yisrael Reisman shared an idea from Rav Gedalia Schorr on the piyyut of לחי עולמים that we say on ימים נוראים. Each phrase in this piyyut is comprised of opposites; for example, we normally say that "סייג לחכמה שתיקה", i.e. when one is engaged in דיבור it signifies a lack of דעה, and yet the piyyut mentions "הדעה והדיבור" going together. A similar combination of opposites is found in the phrase, "ההוד וההדר" - hadar is outer beauty (esrog is described as a, "פרי עץ הדר" because it has a beautiful exterior but has nothing to look at on the inside), while hod is inner beauty, as we see when Rashi explains the words, "כי קרן עור פניו" to mean קרני ההוד because it was an internal glow that emanated from Moshe Rabbeinu. We often find these qualities to be mutually exclusive. When two middos don't typically go together, their combination is only found לחי עולמים - in Hashem - but not in us. Only Hashem can have ל"ג בעומר together with a terrible tragedy and make sense of it all. Only Hashem can fully reconcile having a יום הזכרון and a יום העצמאות at the same exact time. We are incapable of feeling the depth of both of those emotions simultaneously. We are left with the simple task of feeling a Jew's pain.

Ironically, the greatest source of comfort is the pain that we feel. I recall how on the day after the Meron tragedy a few years ago, all day Friday I was fielding phone calls and some people just stopped by my office, to do nothing other than to cry together. To paraphrase the expression - "there is nothing as complete and whole as a broken people". It is precisely this ability to feel one another's pain that will bring about the ישועה that we so desperately daven for. B'ezras Hashem we should all see the day of הוד and הדר, the full glory of the final steps of הגיענו לזמן הזה.

---

from: Destiny Foundation/**Rabbi Berel Wein** <info@jewishdestiny.com>
reply-to: info@jewishdestiny.com
subject: Weekly Parsha from Rabbi Berel Wein
Home Weekly Parsha EMOR
Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

The beginning part of this week's parsha refers to the special laws and status regarding kohanim – the descendants of Aharon. It is common knowledge that a study based on the DNA samples of many current day kohanim reveals a common genetic strain amongst a considerable number of those who participated in the study. This strain is found to be common even amongst people who live in different areas of the world, separated by thousands of miles and centuries of differing ethnicities.

The jury is still out whether these DNA findings have any halachic validity and as to what exactly these findings prove. Over the centuries of Jewish life, the kohanim have fiercely protected their lineal descent from Aharon and zealously guarded their status of legitimacy as being kohanim. Kohanim are held in high regard in the Jewish world and are entitled to certain special privileges and honors in the Jewish religious society.

Though it seems that it is permissible for a kohein to waive some of those privileges if he so wishes, preferred behavior dictates that he not do so. The status of the kohein is to be preserved as a remembrance of their special role in the Temple services in Jerusalem. But in a deeper sense, it is to be preserved to remind us of their special mission "to guard with their lips knowledge and to teach Torah to those who request it."

They are to be a blessing to the people of Israel and they are commanded to, in turn, bless the people of Israel. Blessed are those that are commanded to bless others. Thus the status of a kohein is representative of all that is noble and positive in Jewish life and tradition – knowledge, Torah, grace, security and peace. The question of ersatz kohanim is discussed widely in connection with halachic decisions. Not every person who claims to be a kohein is really a kohein. Since true pedigrees are very difficult to truly ascertain today, the halacha adopts a position that who is really a kohein is a matter of doubt. Great rabbinic decisors, especially in the United States, have often, in cases of dire circumstances, "annulled" the kehuna of an individual.

In the confusion of immigration into the United States at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries, there were people who disguised themselves as kohanim in order to earn the monies of pidyon haben – the redemption of the first born son from the kohein. These people were charlatans, but many other simple Jews assumed that they were kohanim as well, without any real proof of the matter. Even tombstones that declared that one's father was a kohein were not to be accepted as definitive proof of the matter. Therefore, the DNA results are most interesting and provocative.

The halacha has not yet determined with certainty the trustworthiness of DNA results in matters that require halachic decision. Therefore, it is premature to speculate whether DNA testing will ever be used as a method of determining one's true status as a kohein. Meanwhile the kohanim should retain their tradition of pedigree to the best of their abilities.

Shabbat shalom.
Rabbi Berel Wein

---

from: **The Rabbi Sacks Legacy Trust** <info@rabbisacks.org>
subject: Covenant and Conversation
COVENANT & CONVERSATION
Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks zt"l
The Duality of Jewish Time
EMOR
Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

Alongside the holiness of place and person is the holiness of time, something parshat Emor charts in its deceptively simple list of festivals and holy days (Lev. 23:1-44).

Time plays an enormous part in Judaism. The first thing God declared holy was a day: Shabbat, at the conclusion of Creation. The first mitzvah given to the Jewish people as a whole, prior to the Exodus, was the command to sanctify time, by determining and applying the Jewish calendar (Ex. 12:1-2). The Prophets were the first people in history to see God in history, seeing time itself as the arena of the Divine-human encounter. Virtually every other religion and civilisation before and since has identified God, reality, and truth with timelessness.

Isaiah Berlin used to quote Alexander Herzen who said about the Slavs that they had no history, only geography. The Jews, he said, had the reverse: a great deal of history but all too little geography. Much time, but little space.

So time in Judaism is an essential medium of the spiritual life. But there is one feature of the Jewish approach to time that has received less attention than it should: the duality that runs through its entire temporal structure.

Take, for instance, the calendar as a whole. Christianity uses a solar calendar, Islam a lunar one. Judaism uses both. We count time both by the monthly cycle of the moon and the seasonal cycle of the sun.

Then consider the day. Days normally have one identifiable beginning, whether this is at nightfall or daybreak or – as in the West – somewhere between. For calendar purposes, the Jewish day begins at nightfall ("And it was evening and it was morning, one day"). But if we look at the structure of the prayers – the morning prayer instituted by Abraham, afternoon by Isaac, evening by Jacob – there is a sense in which the worship of the day starts in the morning, not the night before.

Years, too, usually have one fixed beginning – the "new year". In Judaism, according to the Mishnah (Rosh Hashanah 1:1), there are no less than four "new years". The first of Ellul is the new year for the tithing of animals. The

fifteenth of Shvat (or, according to Bet Shammai, the first of Shvat) is the new year for trees. These are specific and subsidiary dates, but the other two are more fundamental.

According to the Torah, the first month of the year is Nissan. This was the day the earth became dry after the Flood (Gen. 8:13)[1]. It was the day the Israelites received their first command as a people (Ex. 12:2). One year later it was the day the Tabernacle was dedicated and the service of the Priests inaugurated (Ex. 40:2). But the festival we call the New Year, Rosh Hashanah, falls six months later.

Holy time itself comes in two forms, as Emor makes clear. There is Shabbat and there are the festivals, and the two are announced separately. Shabbat was sanctified by God at the beginning of time for all time. The festivals are sanctified by the Jewish people to whom was given the authority and responsibility for fixing the calendar.

Hence the difference in the blessings we say. On Shabbat we praise God who "sanctifies Shabbat". On the festivals we praise God who sanctifies "Israel and the holy times" – meaning, it is God who sanctifies Israel but Israel who sanctifies the holy times, determining on which days the festivals fall.

Even within the festivals there is a dual cycle. One is formed by the three pilgrimage festivals: Pesach, Shavuot, and Succot. These are days that represent the key historic moments at the dawn of Jewish time – the Exodus, the giving of the Torah, and the forty years of desert wandering. They are festivals of history.

The other is formed by the number seven and the concept of holiness: the seventh day, Shabbat; the seventh month, Tishri, with its three festivals of Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur and Succot; the seventh year, Shemittah; and the Jubilee marking the completion of seven seven-year cycles.

These times (with the exception of Succot that belongs to both cycles) have less to do with history than with what, for want of a better word, we might call metaphysics and jurisprudence, ultimate truths about the universe, the human condition, and the laws, both natural and moral, under which we live.

Each is about creation (Shabbat, a reminder of it, Rosh Hashanah the anniversary of it), Divine sovereignty, justice, and judgment, together with the human condition of life, death, mortality. So on Yom Kippur we face justice and judgment. On Succot/Shemini Atzeret we pray for rain, celebrate nature (bringing together the lulav, etrog, hadassim, and aravot as the arba minim – the four species – is the only mitzvah we do with unprocessed natural objects), and we read the book of Kohelet, Tanach's most profound meditation on mortality.

In the seventh and Jubilee years we acknowledge God's ultimate ownership of the land of Israel and the Children of Israel. Hence we let slaves go free, release debts, let the land rest, and restore most property to its original owners. All of these have to do not with God's interventions into history but with His role as Creator and owner of the universe.

One way of seeing the difference between the first cycle and the second is to compare the prayers on Pesach, Shavuot, and Succot with those of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. The Amidah of Pesach, Shavuot, and Succot begins with the phrase "You chose us from all the peoples." The emphasis is on Jewish particularity.

By contrast, the Amidah for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur begins by speaking of "all You have made, all You have created". The emphasis is on universality: about the judgment that affects all of creation, everything that lives.

Even Succot has a marked universalist thrust with its seventy sacrificial bulls representing the "seventy nations". According to Zechariah 14, it is the festival that will one day be celebrated by all the nations.

Why the duality? Because God is both the God of nature and of culture. He is the God of everyone in general, and of the people of the covenant in particular. He is the Author of both scientific law (cause) and religious-ethical law (command).

We encounter God in both cyclical time, which represents the movement of the planets, and linear-historical time, which represents the events and evolution of the nation of which we are a part. This very duality gives rise to two kinds of religious leader: the Prophet and the Priest, and the different consciousness of time each represents.

Since the ancient Greeks, people have searched for a single principle that would explain everything, or the single point Archimedes sought at which to move the world, or the unique perspective (what philosophers call "the view from nowhere") from which to see truth in all its objectivity.

Judaism tells us there is no such point. Reality is more complicated than that. There is not even a single concept of time. At the very least we need two perspectives to be able to see reality in three dimensions, and that applies to time as well as space. Jewish time has two rhythms at once.

Judaism is to the spirit what Niels Bohr's complementarity theory is to quantum physics. In physics light is both a wave and a particle. In Judaism time is both historical and natural. Unexpected, counter-intuitive, certainly. But glorious in its refusal to simplify the rich complexity of time: the ticking clock, the growing plant, the ageing body, and the ever-deepening mind.

[1] Although this, too, is the subject of an argument. In Gemara Rosh Hashanah 11b (quoted by Rashi Bereishit Chapter 8:13) Rabbi Yehoshua says this occurred in Nissan and Rabbi Eliezer counters that it happened in Tishrei.

---

from: **Ira Zlotowitz** <Iraz@klalgovoah.org>
date: May 16, 2024, 7:00 PM
subject: Tidbits for Parashas Emor

This Wednesday, May 22nd, is Pesach Sheini (14th of Iyar). Many do not say Tachanun; even so, many still recite Tachanun on Tuesday at Minchah. Some have the minhag to eat matzah on Pesach Sheini. Pesach Sheini provides a second opportunity to bring the Korban Pesach for those who were unable to bring the Korban Pesach on time (14th of Nissan).

At Maariv on this Sunday, May 19th, those davening Nusach Ashkenaz will have omitted Mashiv Haruach for the 90th time. Those davening Nusach Sefard will have included Morid Hatal for the 90th time during Minchah on Sunday, May 19th. After this point, one is considered accustomed to the new text, and does not repeat Shemoneh Esrei if he is unsure if he davened correctly.

Pirkei Avos: Perek 3

The final opportunity for Kiddush Levana is Wednesday May 22nd at 11:42 PM ET

Pesach Sheini is next Wednesday, May 22nd.

Lag Ba'omer is on Sunday, May 26th.

Shavuos is on Wednesday and Thursday, June 12th-13th.

Emor: Laws of Kohanim and their households • Parameters of acceptable Korbanos • Shabbos and the holidays • Description of the lighting of the Menorah and the arrangement of the Lechem HaPanim • The Megadeif curses Hashem, and is put to death for his sin • The punishment for murder • The penalties for damages • See Taryag Weekly for the various mitzvos.

Haftarah: The Parashah began with discussing the laws of Kohanim. Yechezkel (44:15-31) discusses laws of the Kohanim, including the laws which will apply at the time of the third Beis HaMikdash - may it be built speedily within our days.

"אֱמֹר אֶל־הַכֹּהֲנִים בְּנֵי אַהֲרֹן וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם"

"Speak to the Kohanim the sons of Aharon and say to them" (Vayikra 21:1)

The Midrash explains the intent of the double expression of "Emor" and "V'amarta" is to caution the elders regarding the youth about this mitzvah of being careful about purity. One may understand this Midrash that Moshe Rabbeinu was to instruct the elders in "V'amarta", in that after Moshe relayed this mitzvah to them, they, the elders, should in turn relay this mitzvah to the youth. However the pasuk seems to state that the word "V'amarta" is also referring to Moshe's directives to the elders. What was the nature of this extra instruction to the elders?

There is a well known expression that a person's luxuries become his child's necessities. One who indulges periodically may set these 'extras' as a basic standard for his child. This is true regarding ruchniyus as well; one who sets a high bar in performance of mitzvos sets his next generation in a position where their basic standard is on a higher level and vice versa. Rav Moshe Feinstein zt"l explains that Moshe was to explain to the older generation that their adherence and approach to this mitzvah (and indeed all Mitzvos) will set the standard and tone of how the future generations will conduct themselves. One's actions live on far after he leaves this world, as the higher standard he achieves becomes the standard of his children and future generations.

Ira Zlotowitz - Founder | iraz@gparency.com | 917.597.2197
Ahron Dicker - Editor | adicker@klalgovoah.org | 732.581.5830

---

www.matzav.com or www.torah.org/learning/drasha
Parsha Parables By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky
Drasha
By **Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky**
Parshas Emor
Holier Than Thou

One of the most disheartening episodes that occurred during the 40-year desert sojourn is recorded in this week's parsha. A man quarreled with a fellow Jew and left the dispute in a rage. He reacted by blaspheming Hashem. This abhorrent behavior was so aberrant that no one even knew what the punishment was!

So Hashem reviewed the grievous penalty for the deplorable act. As in any society, the ultimate act of treason was met with a capitol sentence. The Torah declared a death penalty. But curiously enough, Hashem does not leave it at that. When the Torah reveals the penalty for the heinous act of blasphemy, it continues:

"And one who blasphemes the name of Hashem shall be put to death…And if a man inflicts a mortal wound in his fellow man, he shall be put to death. If he inflicts damage then restitution shall be paid. The value of an eye for the loss of an eye, the value of a break for a break the value of a tooth for the loss of a tooth. And one who wounds an animal must be made to pay. (Leviticus 24:15-21)

Shouldn't blasphemy be in a league of it own? Surely the act of affronting G-d Almighty can not be equated with attacking human beings. And surely it has no place next to the laws of injurious action towards animals! Why, then is t Rabbi Y'honasan Eibeschutz one of Jewry's most influential leaders during the early 1700s, was away from his home for one Yom Kippur and was forced to spend that holy day in a small town. Without revealing his identity as Chief Rabbi of Prague, Hamburg, and Altoona, he entered a synagogue that evening and surveyed the room, looking for a suitable place to sit and pray.

Toward the center of the synagogue, his eyes fell upon a man who was swaying fervently, tears swelling in his eyes. "How encouraging," thought the Rabbi, "I will sit next to him. His prayers will surely inspire me."

It was to be. The man cried softly as he prayed, tears flowed down his face. "I am but dust in my life, Oh Lord," wept the man. "Surely in death!" The sincerity was indisputable. Reb Y'honasan finished the prayers that evening, inspired. The next morning he took his seat next to the man, who, once again, poured out his heart to G-d, declaring his insignificance and vacuity of merit.

During the congregation's reading of the Torah, something amazing happened. A man from the front of the synagogue was called for the third aliyah, one of the most honorable aliyos for an Israelite, and suddenly Rabbi Eibeschutz's neighbor charged the podium!

"Him!" shouted the man. "You give him shlishi?!" The shul went silent. Reb Y'honasan stared in disbelief. "Why I know how to learn three times as much as he! I give more charity than he and I have a more illustrious family! Why on earth would you give him an aliyah over me?"

With that the man stormed back from the bimah toward his seat.

Rabbi Eibeschutz could not believe what he saw and was forced to approach the man. "I don't understand," he began. "Minutes ago you were crying about how insignificant and unworthy you are and now you are clamoring to get the honor of that man's aliyah?"

Disgusted the man snapped back. "What are you talking about? Compared to Hashem I am truly a nothing." Then he pointed to the bimah and sneered, "But not compared to him!"

Perhaps the Torah reiterates the laws of damaging mortal and animals in direct conjunction with His directives toward blasphemy. Often people are very wary of the honor they afford their spiritual guides, mentors and institutions. More so are they indignant about the reverence and esteem afforded their Creator. Mortal feelings, property and posessions are often trampled upon even harmed even by those who seem to have utmost respect for the immortal. This week the Torah, in the portion that declares the enormity of blasphemy, does not forget to mention the iniquity of striking someone less than Omnipotent. It links the anthropomorphic blaspheming of G-d to the crime of physical damage toward those created in His image. It puts them one next to each other. Because all of Hashem's creations deserve respect.

Even the cows.

Good Shabbos
Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

---

from: **Rabbi Yochanan Zweig** <genesis@torah.org>
to: rabbizweig@torah.org
subject: Rabbi Zweig
Parshas Emor
Rabbi Yochanan Zweig
Speaking vs. Communicating

Hashem said to Moshe, say to the Kohanim, the sons of Aharon, and you should say to them: to a dead person you should not become impure […](21:1).

Rashi (ad loc), quoting the Gemara (Yevamos 114a), explains that the reason the word "emor – say" is used repeatedly ("say to the Kohanim" and then again "say to them") is to enjoin the adults to instruct the minors that they are not permitted to become unclean by coming in contact with a corpse.

In general, the Torah uses several different words to describe speaking – the most common ones being daber and emor (usually translated as "speak" and "say" respectively). What is the practical difference between the two words and when does the Torah choose to use one instead of the other?

We find a fascinating possuk in Sefer Bamidbar: "And when Moshe went into the Tent of Meeting to speak with Him, he heard the voice of one speaking ("medaber") from the Kapores, from between the two kerubim; and

he spoke to him" (7:89). Rashi (ad loc) makes an unusual comment; Moshe was just listening in while Hashem was speaking to Himself. In other words, the term "daber" refers to the act of an utterance, even when one is merely talking to himself (e.g. reciting poetry).

On the other hand, the word "emor" refers to an act of communication. In Parshas Yisro, Moshe is told, "Thus shall you say ("somar") to Beis Yaakov, and tell the Bnei Yisroel" (19:3). Rashi (ad loc) explains that Beis Yaakov refers to the women of the Jewish people. Hashem tells Moshe to "tell" the men the laws while to the women he must speak gently.

Similarly, we find the Mishna in Shabbos (2:7) says that a man is obligated to say ("lomar") in his home on Erev Shabbos, "Have you tithed (the produce)? Have you made an eruv (for walking and carrying)? If yes, the man then says, 'light the candle.'" Here too the Gemara (Shabbos 34a) mentions that it must be said gently.

In other words, women don't want to be spoken to, they want to be communicated with (probably not a shock to anyone who has been married). This is why the word "emor" is used in regards to women; "emor" means to communicate not dictate.

In this week's parsha, the Torah is telling us that we must be very sensitive to what we are telling the Kohanim. The Kohanim have an elevated responsibility that outstrips that of the rest of Bnei Yisroel. Here the Kohanim are told that they must not come into contact with a dead person, however, this restriction is a little counterintuitive.

After all, preparing the dead for burial and accompanying the body to the grave is considered a great kindness – known as a "chessed shel emes." This prohibition on the Kohanim is theirs alone; even the greatest of Torah scholars are permitted to become "tamei," and it is in fact considered to be performing a great mitzvah.

When asking someone to accept a higher level of responsibility or service, we must be careful not to impose it on them. This is why Hashem asked Moshe to communicate with the Kohanim, who in turn were to communicate it to their children. Asking someone to do something that others are not obligated to do requires a full explanation of why it should be done.

This is particularly true when we are dealing with our children. When we want to teach them rules that go beyond the scope of social rules, such as not to steal or not to kill, we must patiently explain to them why we do what we do. Simply telling them that they have to keep Shabbos or put on teffilin is not an effective manner of getting them to accept or follow the mitzvos. We must communicate to them the beauty and meaning behind our mitzvos. In this way, we can be sure that they will appreciate what Yiddishkeit is really all about, and ensure that they will convey the meaning to their children.

Customizing the Law

And Moshe declared the festivals of Hashem to Bnei Yisroel (23:44).

The last Mishna in tractate Megillah concludes with a verse from this week's parsha and the following teaching: And Moshe declared the festivals of Hashem to Bnei Yisroel – indicating that it is an obligation to read each and every festival portion at its appropriate time (Megillah 31a). The final Gemara in the tractate further elucidates with the following statement, "Our rabbis taught, Moshe instituted for them, (Bnei) Yisroel, that they should inquire about the matters of the day (holidays) – the laws of Pesach on Pesach, the laws of Shavuos on Shavuos and the laws of Sukkos on Sukkos" (ibid 32a).

Maimonides (Yad; Hilchos Tefillah 13:8) comments that Moshe Rabbeinu instituted that on every holiday we read from the Torah sections that are relevant to that holiday. Seemingly, Moshe also chose which sections to read on each holiday. Yet, when Maimonides discusses which portion is read on Pesach he says, "It was instituted to read from the edition of the holidays (in this week's parsha) but the custom has become to read (a different section from Parshas Bo)." Rambam is following the opinion of Abaye in the Gemara (Megilla 31a).

This seems to be very odd. Moshe Rabbeinu instructed them to read certain sections on the holidays. How is it possible that someone would abrogate what Moshe instituted? In addition, the language of the Gemara is very unusual: "Moshe instituted for them, Yisroel, that they should read […]" Why do we need the extra words "for them," why not merely say Moshe instituted for Yisroel?

In every generation, the Beis Din serves two functions; one is that they are the final arbiters of what laws are to be included in the Oral Law (i.e. using the exegetical rules that are applied to the analysis of the Torah). In other words, halacha needs to be an evolving entity in order to address new situations that arise, and the Beis Din applies the accepted methods to make a ruling on what the halacha is. In this way, they are empowered by Hashem to act as the interpreters of the Oral Law. This began with Moshe and he gave that authority to Yehoshua, and it has continued throughout the generations.

But the Beis Din has another important function. They are also the legislative body of the Jewish people; enacting laws that enable society to function properly. As an example, even though according to Torah Law the sabbatical year dissolves all personal loans, the sages instituted a system whereby creditors would be protected so that creditors would not be discouraged from lending money (there are many such examples). These laws aren't interpretations of the Torah, they are laws instituted so that society can function properly. This legislative power is derived from the people.

Moshe Rabbeinu didn't institute the reading from the relevant Torah portions on each holiday as a Torah law. He instituted it as a way of enhancing the holiday and making it meaningful for us. This is why the double language is used; he did it for them, for their sake. As it was done as a legislative function, it was the kind of law that could be changed by a succeeding Beis Din. Thus, the custom of what to read can be determined and changed by succeeding generations as the power remains with the people.

We must also bear in mind that customs of one segment of our society have great legitimacy and efficacy, and often bear the weight of Torah law. However, we mustn't confuse customs for actual Torah law. Whether your custom on Pesach is to eat rice, or non-gebrokts, or to put teffilin on Chol Hamoed, they are all valid ways of observing Torah and mitzvos.

---

https://jewishlink.news/look-in-the-mirror-3/

Look In The Mirror

Rabbi Moshe Taragin

May 13, 2024

We watched in horror as rabid mobs chanted, "Death to the Jews." We presumed that our modern and enlightened culture would not tolerate such hatred and unabashed bigotry. The monstrosity of Jew-hatred just will not die. These violent protests are also bewildering for a number of ways. Muslim and Arab protesters are vehemently supported by average, run- of-the mill, Western college students. Why are unaffiliated students so angry at our people and so opposed to our rights to our homeland? Astonishingly, the protests also include a broad range of minority groups, such as Black Lives Matter and members of different orientations and gender identities. Their betrayal is stinging. For years, Jews spearheaded social justice movements, campaigning to protect their rights and their dignity. Now that we need their support, they have turned their backs on us.

How did these seemingly unrelated groups get dragged into this consortium of hatred? Why are they so passionately opposed to our rights to live and breathe in our homeland? Why are they so shamelessly and falsely accusing us of committing genocide? Part of the answer lies in the powerful doctrine of intersectionality that now permeates modern culture. This ideology globalizes moral calculus by asserting that all forms of oppression or discrimination are interdependent. Because all discrimination overlaps, all marginalized groups with grievances must support one

another in their respective battles for justice. The battle for equality of an African-American woman has become fused with the war in Gaza. Thus, any group struggling against any form of discrimination must vigorously protest against Israel's right to security. By asserting that all aggrieved parties share a common enemy—recently termed the "constellations of power," which systematically discriminates against the weak, intersectionality thus internationalizes social justice. This warped cultural narrative creates the ludicrous scene of gay people supporting Hamas murderers, even though Hamas terrorists would gladly toss them off a roof and drag their bodies through the street. But to people blinded by intersectionality, facts don't matter. The culture of intersectionality raises numerous moral challenges and threatens our religious values. By stressing grievances, it promotes a culture of victimhood and encourages competition for rights and benefits. In their worldview, the best way to triumph is to insist others recognize your past disadvantage. The group that in the past has been the most victimized possesses superior virtue and deserves a larger piece of the pie.

The politics of victimhood demands that society acknowledges grievances and offers compensation for collective past suffering; thus, victimhood becomes a power play. Additionally, by casting themselves as passive, feeble targets of injustice, victims easily deflect personal accountability for self-improvement. Moreover, intersectionality rapidly escalates resentment into fury. Once discrimination is viewed as systemic, chronic violence is easily justified. If the system is stacked and inherently unfair, any and by all means necessary become an acceptable response. Perhaps the most troubling aspect of intersectionality is that it paints the world in very dark colors as an ongoing power struggle. This view of the world is very Marxist. According to Marx, history is driven by a class struggle between the bourgeoisie, or management, and the proletariat, or working class. The tensions and contradictions emerging from this struggle shape society.

By replacing one class struggle with another, intersectionality has become the modern version of Marxism. Instead of centering the struggle between the working class and management, it portrays a wholesale conflict between privileged white males and victimized underclasses. By stressing power dynamics and systems of control, it portrays society in a perpetual state of conflict and envisions the world as sharply divided between oppressors and victims. This pessimistic view of a society encourages "confrontationalism" and contentiousness rather than cooperation and collaboration. It perpetuates rage and promotes cycles of retaliation. Religious people don't view the world through belligerent and militant lenses. We don't assume that conflict is necessary for progress. Society isn't shaped by class warfare but by mutual respect, cooperation, compassion, education, and, of course, religious values and moral spirit. Class warfare and social conflict are not essential for societal improvement. In fact, they detract from it. The ideology of intersectionality is what accounts for college students joining these protests of hate, as this generation was raised on intersectional belief. This ideology also accounts for minority groups joining rallies in support of murderers, since they believe they are campaigning for broader global justice. No crime is unpardonable in the heroic battle against the global system of discrimination. Intersectionality is also responsible for inflaming the fanatical anger and rage of these protests. Flag burning, school lockouts, road closures, blockading airports, hyperbolic use of language, rioting, and of course, threats of violence and actual violence.

Look In The Mirror

Does any of this sound familiar? Turn back the clock a year. Many of these ugly scenes unfolded in our very own country, in the streets of Jerusalem, the intersections of Tel Aviv, and the highways of Ayalon. Absurdly and ironically, there was an intersectional dynamic fueling our own recent year of social discontent.

There are many fault lines that divide Israel. We are in the process of a historic project to assemble Jews from across different ethnic, racial, religious, political, and ideological lines. An ambitious project of this magnitude has never been attempted before. These protests surrounding judicial reform felt intersectional. People took positions based on religion and ideology rather than a logical assessment of facts. People were checking boxes. Most right- wing, traditional, religious Jews supported this reform. Most secular, left-leaning Jews were strongly opposed. Judicial reform is an issue that will shape our future society. Support or opposition should be based on a dispassionate assessment of the pros and cons and should not be hinged on religion or political affiliation. The radicalization of the debate and the ensuing protests reflected the intersectionality of Israeli society and how we have begun to cluster around unrelated issues. It should not be this way. We should consider important issues on their own without allowing preconceived religious or political leanings to dictate our opinions.

Violent Speech

Not only were the protests surrounding judicial reform intersectional, they incited violent speech, eerily similar to, but not as vicious as, the current verbal violence of the anti-Israel rallies. Violence of speech and print quickly turn into violence of blood. Over the past few decades, the U.S. has allowed a climate of hateful speech to flourish, and that climate is now emboldening anti-Israel protesters to support rapists and murderers and to threaten the lives of Jews. Language has spiraled out of control. During last year's protests, we were careless with our own use of language and too often defaulted to vile demagoguery. Judicial reform opponents were unfairly cast as anarchists, while supporters were marked as fascists. How did a political debate about the selection of Supreme Court justices become a war between fascists and anarchists? My own saddest memory from the year of protests was the horrible use of the term "Nazi" to describe other Jews. I hope that after Oct. 7, no Jew will ever again commit this hideous crime against Jewish history. Any Jewish mouth that defames another Jew with that odious label doesn't deserve to pray or study Torah. I don't know G-d's will or why Oct. 7 happened. I don't know why we continue to face this revolting and abhorrent hatred. No one does. One thing I do know is that these angry anti-Israel protests hold up a mirror to some of our own ugly behavior of a year ago. Face the horror of that behavior and that dark period and don't shirk responsibility for the way we acted and spoke. Pledge to yourself to never fall into that category of animosity and contempt.

Never again.

Rabbi Moshe Taragin is a rabbi at Yeshivat Har Etzion/Gush, a hesder yeshiva. He has semicha and a B.A. in computer science from Yeshiva University, as well as an M.A. in English Literature from City University of New York. He is the author of "Dark Clouds Above, Faith Below" providing religious responses to the massacres of October 7 and the ensuing war. Available in bookstores or at https://kodeshpress.com/product/dark-clouds-above-faith-below/ and https://www.amazon.com/dp/B0CZ7N8ZJB

._____

from: **Rabbi YY Jacobson** <rabbiyy@theyeshiva.net>
date: May 16, 2024, 4:08 PM
subject: **It's a Beautiful Heart - Essay by Rabbi YY**

It's a Beautiful Heart

Counting Days and Weeks: Confronting Mental Illness, Trauma, and Depression

Counting Days and Weeks

There are three kinds of people, goes the old joke: those who can count and those who can't.

There is something strange about the way we count 'sefirah'—the 49-day count, in the Jewish tradition, between Passover and the festival of Shavuos. The Talmud states:[1]

Abaye stated, "It is a Mitzvah to count the days, and it is a Mitzvah to count the weeks." This is because both are mentioned explicitly in the Torah:

Leviticus 23:15-16: From the day following the (first) rest day (of Pesach)—the day you bring the Omer as a wave-offering—you should count for yourselves seven weeks. (When you count them) they should be perfect. You should count until (but not including) fifty days, (i.e.) the day following the seventh week. (On the fiftieth day) you should bring (the first) meal-offering (from the) new (crop) to G-d.

Deuteronomy 16:9-10: You shall count seven weeks for yourself; from [the time] the sickle is first put to the standing crop, you shall begin to count seven weeks. And you shall perform the Festival of Weeks to the Lord, your God, the donation you can afford to give, according to how the Lord, your God, shall bless you.

Clearly, the Torah talks about two forms of counting: counting seven weeks and counting 49 days. We thus fulfill both mandates: At the conclusion of the first week, we count as follows: "Today is seven days, which is one week to the Omer." The next night, we count as follows: "Today is eight days,

which is one week and one day to the Omer." "Today is forty-eight days, which is six weeks and six days to the Omer."

Yet this is strange. Why is the Torah adamant that we count both the days and the weeks simultaneously? One of these counts is superfluous. What do we gain by counting the week after counting the days? Either say simply: "Today is seven days to the Omer," and if you want to know how many weeks that is, you can do the math yourself, or alternatively, stick to weeks: "Today is one week to the Omer," and you don't have to be a genius to know how many days that includes!

Biblical or Rabbinic?

There is yet another perplexing matter.

The "Karban Omer" was a barley offering brought to the Holy Temple on the second day of Passover (on the 16th of Nissan). They would harvest barley, grind it to flower, and offer a fistful of the flower on the altar. The rest of the flower would be baked as matzah and eaten by the Kohanim (Omer is the Hebrew name for the volume of flower prepared; it is the volume of 42.2 eggs).

Hence, the Torah states:[2] "And you shall count for yourselves from the morrow of the Sabbath, from the day on which you bring the Omer offering, seven complete weeks shall there be ,until the morrow of the seventh week you shall count fifty days..."

When the Beis HaMikdash (Holy Temple) stood in Jerusalem, this offering of a measure (omer) of barley, brought on the second day of Passover, marked the commencement of the seven-week count. Today, we lack the opportunity to bring the Omer offering on Passover. The question then arises, is there still a mandate to do the sefirat haomer, the counting of the Omer? Without the Omer, are we still obligated to count the seven-week period?

As you may have guessed, there is a dispute among our sages.

שולחן ערוך הרב אורח חיים סימן תפט סעיף ב: ומצוה זו נוהגת בארץ ובחו"ל בפני הבית ושלא בפני הבית. ויש אומרים שבזמן הזה שאין בית המקדש קיים ואין מקריבין העומר אין מצוה זו נוהגת כלל מדברי תורה אלא מדברי סופרים שתיקנו זכר למקדש וכן עיקר.

The Rambam (Maimonides), the Chinuch, the Ravya, and others believe that the mandate to count isn't dependent on the Omer offering. Even today, we are obligated biblically to count 49 days between Passover and Shavuos. However, Tosefot and most halachic authorities, including the Code of Jewish Law,[3] maintain the view that the biblical mitzvah of counting directly depends on the actual Omer offering. Hence, today, there is only a rabbinic obligation to count, to commemorate the counting in the time of the Holy Temple. Our counting today is not a full-fledged biblical commandment (mitzvah deoraita) but a rabbinical ordinance that merely commemorates the mitzvah fulfilled in the times of the Beit HaMikdash.

So far so good.

The Third Opinion

But there is a fascinating third and lone opinion, that of the 13th-century French and Spanish sage Rabbeinu Yerucham.[4]

רבינו ירוחם ספר תולדות אדם וחוה, חלק אדם, נתיב ה חלק ד: ונראה לן, משום דכתוב בתורה [שתי פרשיות], שבעה שבועות תספור לך וגו' וכתיב נמי מיום הביאכם את עומר וגו' שבע שבתות תמימות תהיין, נמצא שלא נכתבה ספירת שבועות כי אם גבי העומר, אבל ספירת הימים [תספרו חמשים יום] לא כתיב גבי עומר, נמצא דספירת הימים הוא מן התורה אפילו בזמן הזה, וספירת השבועות בזמן דאיכא עומר. והיו מברכים זה על זה בזמן שביהמ"ק היה קיים... ובזמן הזה אנו סופרים לשבועות זכר למקדש... לכך אנו אומרים שהם כך וכך שבועות שאין זו ספירה ממש.

He says that it depends which counting we are talking about. The days or the weeks. The counting of the days is a biblical mandate even today, while the counting of the weeks, says Rabbeinu Yerucham, is only a rabbinic mandate.

This third opinion is an interesting combination of the first two: According to Rabbeinu Yerucham, it is a biblical mitzvah to count the days even when the Beit HaMikdash is not extant, but the mitzvah to count the weeks applies only when the Omer is offered and is thus today only a rabbinical commandment.

The rationale behind his view is fascinating. When the Torah states to count the weeks, it is stated in context of the Omer offering; so, without the omer offering, the biblical obligation falls away. But when the Torah states to count the days, it says so independently of the Omer offering. So even without an omer, there is still a mitzvah to count 49 days.

Now this seems really strange. How are we to understand Rabbeinu Yerucham? Counting is counting, what exactly is the difference between saying "Today is twenty-eight days of the Omer" and saying "Today is four weeks of the Omer"? How can we make sense of the notion that counting days is a biblical mandate while counting weeks is a rabbinic mandate?

To be sure, he offers a convincing proof from the Torah text. But that only transfers the question onto the Torah: What would be the logic to command Jews today, in exile, to count only days and not weeks? Yet Jews during the time of the Holy Temple were commanded by the Torah to do both?

The views of Rambam and Tosefos are clear. Either the entire obligation (the count of the days and the weeks) is biblical, or it is all rabbinic. But the split Rabbanu Yerucham suggests seems enigmatic. Why would the Torah make this differentiation? Why would it deny us the opportunity to count weeks during exile, but still obligate us to count days lacking the Holy Temple?

Two Types of Self-Work

Let's excavate the mystery of the days and the weeks and the three views of Rambam, Tosefos and Rabanu Yerucham, from the deeper emotional, psychological and spiritual vantage point. This explanation was offered by the Lubavitcher Rebbe during an address, on Lag B'Omer 5711, May 24, 1951.[5]

The teachings of Kabbalah and Chassidism describe seven basic character traits in the heart of each human being: Chesed (love, kindness), Gevurah (discipline, boundaries, restraint), Tiferet (beauty, empathy), Netzach (victory, ambition), Hod (humility, gratitude, and acknowledging mistakes), Yesod (bonding and communicatively) and Malchus (leadership, confidence, selflessness).

This is the deeper significance of the "counting of the omer," the mitzvah to count seven weeks from Passover to Shavuot. Judaism designates a period of the year for "communal therapy," when together we go through a process of healing our inner selves, step by step, issue by issue, emotion by emotion. For each of the seven weeks, we focus on one of the seven emotions in our lives, examining it, refining it, and fixing it—aligning it with the Divine emotions.[6]

In the first week, we focus on the love in our lives. Do I know how to express and receive love? Do I know how to love? In the second week, we focus on our capacity for creating boundaries. Do I know how to create and maintain proper borders? In the third week, we reflect on our ability to empathize. Do I know how to emphasize? Do I know how to be here for someone else on their terms, not mine? In the fourth week, we look at our capacity to triumph in the face of adversity. Do I know how to win? Do I have ambition? The fifth week is focused on our ability to express gratitude, show vulnerability, and admit mistakes. The sixth week—on our ability to communicate and bond. And finally, in the seventh week, we focus on our skills as leaders. I'm I confident enough to lead? Do I know how to lead? Do I possess inner dignity? Is my leadership driven by insecurity or egotism? I'm I king over myself? Do I possess inner core self-value?

But as we recall, the mitzvah is to count both the days and the weeks. For each of the seven weeks is further divided into seven days. These seven traits are expressed in our life in various thoughts, words and deeds. So during the seven days of each week, we focus each day on another detail of how this particular emotion expresses itself in our lives. If the week-count represents tackling the core of the emotion itself, the day-count represents tackling not the emotion itself, but rather how it expresses itself in our daily lives, in the details of our lives, in our behaviors, words and thoughts.[7]

Transformation vs. Self-Control

When I say, "Today is one week to the omer," I am saying that today, I managed to tune in to the full scope of that emotion, transforming it and healing it at its core.

Every once in a while, you hear what we call a wonderous journey of incredible healing and transformation. Someone who was struggling with a trauma or an addiction for many years, uncovers a deep awareness, or perhaps goes through a profound healing journey, or a therapeutic program, and they come out completely healed. They have touched such a deep place within themselves, that it completely transformed their life. The trauma is healed; the addiction is gone. Their anger or jealousy is no longer an issue. Like a child who is being toilet trained, at one point, he stops entertaining the idea of using a diaper. He has matured. So too, there is a possibility of counting weeks i.e. completely transforming a particular emotion, completely weeding out the distortions.

The Day Model

But that is a unique experience. And even when it occurs, it may not last forever, or we may still vacillate back to our old coping mechanisms caused by our traumas. We now come to the second model of self-refinement, the "day model." This is the model that belongs to each of us at every moment. I am not always capable of the week-model, but I am always capable of the day-model. There is no great transformation here, the urges are there, the temptations are there, the dysfunction is there, the addictions are there, the negative emotions are there, and the promiscuous cravings are intact, but I manage to refine the day—meaning I learn how to control where and how that emotion will be expressed in the details of my life. I may not be able to redefine the very core of the emotion—the entire "week"—but I can still choose how it will be channeled, or not channeled, in the details of my life.[8]

Imagine you are driving your car and approaching a red light. Now you've got someone in the backseat screaming, "Go! Run the light! Just do it!" The guy is screaming right in your ear. The screams are loud and annoying, but if you're behind the wheel, no amount of screaming can make you run the light. Why not? Because you can identify the screamer as an alien voice to yourself; he is a stranger bringing up a ludicrous and dangerous idea. You may not be able to stop the screaming, but you can identify it and thus quarantine it, putting it in context of where it belongs—to a strange man hollering stupidity.

But imagine if when hearing that voice "take the red light," you decide that it is your rational mind speaking to you; you imagine that this is your intelligence speaking to you—then it becomes so much harder to say no. Same with emotions and thoughts. Even while being emotionally hijacked, I still have the wheel in my hand. I may not have the ability now to transform my urge, and stop the screaming of certain thoughts. Still, as long as I can identify that this thought is not my essence and is coming from a part of me that is insecure and unwholesome, I need not allow that thought to define me and to control my behavior.

Suicidal Thoughts

A woman struggling with suicidal thoughts recently shared with me how she learned to deal with them more effectively.

"I always believed that when I have my suicidal urges, I'm not in control. After all, suicide urges were not something that I could bring up at will - I had to be triggered in a hugely discomforting way for the suicide ideas to surface so vengefully.

"But this time around, I realized that thoughts were just that, thoughts. And it's we who choose if to engage the thoughts and define ourselves by them. We choose to act on our thoughts or not. It's not easy thinking new thoughts when the old familiar thoughts tell you that suicide is the only answer."

If the only thing people learned was not to be afraid of their experience, that alone would change the world. The moment we can look at our urge or temptation in the eye and say, "Hi! I'm not afraid of you, all you are is a thought," we have gained control over that urge.

The Text Message

Say you get a text from your wife: "When are you coming home?" Immediately, you experience a thought that produces anger. "Will she ever appreciate how hard I work? What does she think I am doing here in the office? Can't she just leave me alone!"

But hay, relax. All she asked was when you were coming home, perhaps because she misses you, loves you, and wants to see your face. But due to your own insecurities, you can't even see that. You are used to your mother bashing you, and you instinctively assume she is also bashing you. But she is not. She just asked a simple, innocent question.

Can I get rid of my insecurity and my anger at the moment? No! But I can IDENTIFY my emotion as coming from my insecure dimensions, and I can say to myself, I will not allow that part of myself to take control over my life. I will not allow the toxic image of myself as the man whom everyone is waiting to criticize to overtake me completely. Once I identify where the emotion comes from, I can quarantine it and let it be what it is, but without allowing it to define me. The key is that I do not get trapped into thinking that that thought is me—that it reflects my essence. No! It is just a thought. It is not me. And it does not have to be me. I define it; it does not define me. It is part of me, but it is not all of me. It is the guy in the back seat screaming, "Take the light."

I did not manage to refine the week, but I did manage to refine the day—I got control of how my thoughts and emotions manifest themselves in the individual days and behaviors of my life.

Winston Churchill suffered from depression. In his biography, he describes how he came to see his depression as a black dog always accompanying him and sometimes barking very loudly. But the black dog was not him. The depressing thoughts were just that—thoughts.

One of the powerful ideas in Tanya is that thoughts are the "garments of the soul," not the soul. Garments are made to change. We often see our thoughts as our very selves. But they are not; they are garments. You can change them whenever you want to. [9]

A Beautiful Mind; a Beautiful Life

Several years ago, John Nash, one of the greatest mathematicians of the 20th century, was killed with his wife in a devastating car accident in NJ.

It is hard not to shed a tear when you read the biography "A Beautiful Mind" about the tragic and triumphant life of Mr. Nash (later also produced as a film).

John Nash, born in 1928, was named early in his career as one of the most promising mathematicians in the world. Nash is regarded as one of the great mathematicians of the 20th century. He set the foundations of modern game theory— the mathematics of decision-making—while still in his 20s, and his fame grew during his time at Princeton University and at Massachusetts

Institute of Technology, where he met Alicia Larde, a physics major. They married in 1957.

But by the end of the 1950s, insane voices in his head began to overtake his thoughts on mathematical theory. He developed a terrible mental illness. Nash, in his delusions, accused one mathematician of entering his office to steal his ideas and began to hear alien messages. When Nash was offered a prestigious chair at the University of Chicago, he declined because he planned to become Emperor of Antarctica.

John believed that all men who wore red ties were part of a communist conspiracy against him. Nash mailed letters to embassies in Washington, D.C., declaring they were establishing a government. His psychological issues crossed into his professional life when he gave an American Mathematical Society lecture at Columbia University in 1959. While he intended to present proof of the Riemann hypothesis, the lecture was incomprehensible. He spoke as a madman. Colleagues in the audience immediately realized that something was terribly wrong.

He was admitted to the Hospital, where he was diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia. For many years he spent periods in psychiatric hospitals, where he received antipsychotic medications and shock therapy.

Due to the stress of dealing with his illness, his wife Alicia divorced him in 1963. And yet Alicia continued to support him throughout his illness. After his final hospital discharge in 1970, he lived in Alicia's house as a boarder. It was during this time that he learned how to discard his paranoid delusions consciously. "I had been long enough hospitalized that I would finally renounce my delusional hypotheses and revert to thinking of myself as a human of more conventional circumstances and return to mathematical research," Nash later wrote about himself.

He ultimately was allowed by Princeton University to teach again. Over the years, he became a world-renowned mathematician, contributing majorly to the field. In 2001, Alicia decided to marry again her first sweetheart, whom she once divorced. Alicia and John Nash married each other for the second time.

In later years they both became major advocates for mental health care in New Jersey when their son John was also diagnosed with schizophrenia.

In 1994, John Nash won the Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences.

What Is Logic?

In the final scene of the film, Nash receives the Nobel Prize. During the ceremony, he says the following:

I've always believed in numbers and the equations and logic that lead to reason.

But after a lifetime of such pursuits, I ask,

"What truly is logic?"

"Who decides reason?"

My quest has taken me through the physical, the metaphysical, the delusional—and back.

And I have made the most important discovery of my career, the most important discovery of my life: It is only in the mysterious equations of love that any logic or reasons can be found.

I'm only here tonight because of you [pointing to his wife, Alicia].

You are the reason I am.

You are all my reasons.

Thank you.

The crowd jumps from their chairs, giving a thundering standing ovation to the brilliant mathematician who has been to hell and back a few times.

And then comes one of the most moving scenes.

Nothing Is Wrong

Right after the Noble Prize ceremony, as John is leaving the hall, the mental disease suddenly attacks him in the most vicious and sinister way. Suddenly, his delusions come right back to him, and in the beautiful hallways of Stockholm, he "sees" the very characters that were responsible for destroying his life. He suddenly "sees" all the communists who he believed were out to destroy him.

It is a potentially tragic moment of epic proportions. Here is a man who just won the Nobel Prize, who has become world-renowned, and who is considered one of the greatest minds of the century. Here is a man standing with his loving wife, basking in the shadow of international glory. And yet, at this very moment, the devil of mental illness strikes lethally, mentally "abducting" poor John Nash.

His wife senses that something is happening; she sees how he has suddenly wandered off. He is not present anymore in the real world. His eyes are elsewhere; his body overtaken by fear.

In deep pain and shock, she turns to her husband and asks him, "What is it? What's wrong?"

He pauses, looks at the fictional people living in his tormented mind, then looks back at her, and with a smile on his face he says: "Nothing; nothing at all." He takes her hand and off they go.

It is a moment of profound triumph. Here you have a man at the height of everything, and the schizophrenia suddenly strikes him. There was nothing he could do to get rid of it. It was still there; it never left him. Yet his hard inner world allowed him to identify it as an illness and thus quarantine it. He could define it and place it in context rather than have it define him. He could see it for what it was: an unhealthy mental disease alien to his beautiful essence.

No, he does not get rid of schizophrenia but rather learns how to define it rather than letting it define him. He must be able to at least identify it as thoughts that do not constitute his essence and stem from a part of him that is unhealthy.

John Nash could see all those mental images and say to himself: "These are forces within me; but it is not me. It is a mental illness—and these voices are coming from a part of me that is ill. But I am sitting at the wheel of my life, and I have decided not to allow these thoughts to take over my life. I will continue living, I will continue loving and connecting to my wife and to all the good in my life, even as the devils in my brain never shut up. I can't count my weeks, but I can count my days."

Nash once said something very moving about himself. "I wouldn't have had good scientific ideas if I had thought more normally." He also said, "If I felt completely pressure-less, I don't think I would have gone in this pattern". You see, he managed to even perceive the blessing and the opportunity in his struggle, despite the terrible price he paid for them.

Nash was a hero of real life. Here you have a guy dealing with a terrible mental sickness, but with time, work, and most importantly, with love and support, he learns to stand up to it. He learns how his health isn't defined by the mental chatter and by what his mind decides to show him now. He has learned that despite all of it, day in and day out, he can show up in his life and be in control, rather than the illness controlling him.

The Accident

On May 23, 2015, John and his wife Alicia were on their way home after a visit to Norway, where Nash had received the Abel Prize for Mathematics from King Harald V for his work.

He did arrange for a limo to pick him and his wife up from Newark airport and take them home to West Windsor, NJ. The plane landed early, so they picked up a regular cab to take them home.

They were both sitting in a cab on the New Jersey Turnpike. When the driver of the taxicab lost control of the vehicle and struck a guardrail. Both John and Alicia were ejected from the car upon impact and died on the spot. Nash was 86 years old; his wife 80.

What Can We Achieve Now?

At last, we can appreciate the depth of the Torah law concerning the counting of the omer. The quest for truth, healing, and perfection continues at all times and under all conditions, even in the darkest hours of exile. Thus, we are instructed to count not only the days but also the weeks. We are charged with the duty of learning self-control (days) and trying to achieve transformation (weeks).[10] But it is here that Rabbeinu Yerucham offers us a deeply comforting thought.

True, in the times of the Holy Temple, a time of great spiritual revelation, the Torah instructs us and empowers us to count both days and weeks. In the presence of such intense spiritual awareness, they also had the ability to count weeks. However today, says Rabbeinu Yerucham, we don't breathe the same awareness. We are in exile. We live in a spiritually diminished level of awareness. Hence, the biblical obligation is to count the days, to gain control over our behavior. Counting the weeks, i.e. fully transforming our emotions, is only a rabbinic obligation, simply to reminisce and remember that ultimately there is a path of transformation we strive for.[11]

Indeed, as we are living today in the times of redemption, more and more we are experiencing the ability for full healing—transforming our days and our weeks, bidding farewell to our traumas forever.

[1] Menachos 66a [2] Leviticus 23:15 [3] Tosefos Menachos 66a. Shlchan Aruch Orach Chaim section 489. See all other references quoted in Shlchan Aruch HaRav ibid. [4] Rabanu Yerucham ben Meshullam (1290-1350), was a prominent rabbi and posek during the period of the Rishonim. He was born in Provence, France. In 1306, after the Jewish expulsion from France, he moved to Toledo, Spain. During this time of his life, he became a student of Rabbi Asher ben Yeciell known as the Rosh. In the year 1330, he began writing his work Sefer Maysharim on civil law. He completed this work in four years. At the end of his life, he wrote his main halachik work Sefer Toldos Adam V'Chava. Various components of halacha as ruled by Rabbenu Yerucham, have been codified in the Shulchan Aruch in the name of Rabbeinu Yerucham. He greatly influenced Rabbi Yosef Karo. He is quoted extensively by Rabbi Karo in both the Shulchan Aruch as well as the Beis Yoseif on the Tur. [5] Maamar Usfartem Lag Baomer 5711. As far as I know, it is the first and only source to explain the view of Rabanu Yerucham according to Chassidus. [6] Likkutei Torah Emor, Maamar Usfartem (the first one). [7] Since the focus is on the expression of emotion in the details of our life, hence there are seven days, representing the seven nuanced ways in which each emotion expresses itself, through love, or through might, or through empathy, or through ambition, etc. [8] In many ways, this constitutes the basic difference between the Tzaddik and the Banuni in Tanya. [9] See Tanya Ch. 4, 6, 12, and many more places. [10] See Tanya ch. 14 [11] For Rambam, both counts even today are biblical. Whereas for Tosefos, both counts today are rabbinic. Perhaps we can connect this with the idea in Sefarim, that the galus for the Ashkenazim was far deeper than for the Sefardim.

---

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

How Many Should be Saying Kaddish?

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Question: **Is it better that each mourner recite only one kaddish, or that all the mourners recite all the kaddeishim?**

Answer: Most people are under the impression that whether the "mourner's kaddish" (kaddish yasom) is recited by only one person or whether many recite it simultaneously is a dispute between the practices of Germany and those of Eastern Europe. However, we will soon see that this simplification is inaccurate. There were many communities in Eastern Europe where kaddish was said by only one person at a time, and this was the universal Ashkenazic practice until about 250 years ago.

The custom that many people recite the mourner's kaddish simultaneously was accepted and standard Sefardic practice (meaning the Jews of North Africa and the Middle East), going back at least to the early 18th century (see Siddur Yaavetz, comments after Aleinu), although when this custom was instituted is uncertain. But before we explore the issue of whether more than one person may say kaddish simultaneously, let us first examine the origins of reciting the mourner's kaddish altogether.

Origins of kaddish

Although the Gemara refers to kaddish in numerous places (Brachos 3a, 57a; Shabbos 119b; Sukkah 39a; Sotah 49a), it never mentions what we call kaddish yasom, the kaddish recited by mourners, nor does it recommend or even suggest, anywhere, that a mourner lead the services. The Gemara, also, makes no mention of when kaddish is recited, with the exception of a very cryptic reference to kaddish recited after studying aggadah (see Sotah 49a). A different early source, Masechta Sofrim, mentions recital of kaddish before borchu (10:7) and after musaf (19:12). The fact that the Gemara says nothing about a mourner reciting kaddish or leading services is especially unusual, since the most common source for these practices is an event that predates the Gemara. The Or Zarua, a rishon, records the following story:

Rabbi Akiva once saw a man covered head to toe with soot, carrying on his head the load that one would expect ten men to carry, and running like a horse. Rabbi Akiva stopped the man, and asked him: "Why are you working so hard? If you are a slave and your master works you this hard, I'll redeem you. If you are so poor that you need to work this hard to support your family, I'll find you better employment."

The man replied, "Please do not detain me, lest those appointed over me get angry at me."

Rabbi Akiva asked him: "Who are you, and what is your story?"

The man answered: "I died, and every day they send me like this to chop and carry these amounts of wood. When I am finished, they burn me with the wood that I have gathered."

Rabbi Akiva asked him what his profession was when he was alive, to which he answered that he had been a tax collector (which, in their day, meant someone who purchased from the government the contract to collect taxes) who favored the rich by overtaxing the poor, which the Or Zarua calls "killing the poor."

Rabbi Akiva: "Have you heard from your overseers whether there is any way to release you from your judgment?"

The man responded: "Please do not detain me, lest my overseers become angry with me. I have heard that there is no solution for me, except for one thing that I cannot do. I was told that if I have a son who would lead the tzibur in the recital of borchu or would recite kaddish so that the tzibur would answer yehei shemei rabba mevorach…, they would release me immediately from this suffering. However, I did not leave any sons, but a pregnant wife, and I have no idea if she gave birth to a male child, and if she did, whether anyone is concerned about teaching him, since I have not a friend left in the world."

At that moment, Rabbi Akiva accepted upon himself to find whether a son existed and, if indeed he did, to teach him Torah until he could fulfill what was required to save his father. Rabbi Akiva asked the man for his name, his

wife's name, and the name of the town where he had lived. "My name is Akiva, my wife's name is Shoshniva and I come from Ludkia."

Rabbi Akiva traveled to Ludkia and asked people if they knew of a former resident, Akiva, the husband of Shoshniva, to which he received the following answer: "Let the bones of that scoundrel be ground to pulp." When Rabbi Akiva asked about Shoshniva, he was answered: "May any memory of her be erased from the world." He then inquired about their child, and was answered: "He is uncircumcised -- for we were not interested in involving ourselves even to provide him with a bris milah!" Rabbi Akiva immediately began his search for the son, whom he located -- it turned out that he was already a young adult. Rabbi Akiva performed a bris milah on him and attempted to teach him Torah, but was unable to do so. For forty days, Rabbi Akiva fasted, praying that the child be able to study Torah, at which time a heavenly voice announced: "Rabbi Akiva, now go and teach him Torah!"

Rabbi Akiva taught him Torah, shema, shemoneh esrei, birchas hamazon, and then brought him to shul in order for him to lead the tzibur by reciting kaddish and borchu, to which the tzibur responded, Yehei shemei rabba mevorach le'olam ule'olmei olemaya and "Baruch Hashem hamevorach le'olam va'ed."

At that moment, Akiva, the husband of Shoshniva, was released from his punishment. This Akiva immediately came to Rabbi Akiva in a dream and told him: "May it be Hashem's will that you eventually reach your eternal rest in Gan Eden -- for you have saved me from Gehennom." (This story is also found, with some variation, in the second chapter of Masechta Kallah Rabasi.)

Other versions

When a different rishon, the Rivash, was asked about this story, he reported that it is not found in the Gemara, but perhaps its origin is in Midrash Rabbah or Midrash Tanchuma. He then quotes a story from the Orchos Chayim similar to that quoted by the Or Zarua. In conclusion, the Orchos Chayim emphasizes that, for the twelve months of mourning, a mourner should recite the last kaddish of the davening, maftir on Shabbos and Yom Tov, and lead the services for ma'ariv every motza'ei Shabbos (Shu't Harivash #115).

A similar story is recorded in an earlier midrashic source, the Tanna Devei Eliyahu, where the protagonist is not Rabbi Akiva but his rebbe's rebbe, Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai (see Rambam, Peirush Hamishnayos, end of the fifth chapter of Sotah). In this version, the man was punished until his son turned five and was educated to the point that he could answer borchu in shul (Eliyahu Zuta, Chapter 17). No mention is made of the son reciting kaddish. However, the halachic sources all quote the version of the Or Zarua, in which the protagonist of the story is Rabbi Akiva.

Merits for the deceased

This story serves as the basis for the practice that a mourner leads the services and recite kaddish. Relatively little of this topic is discussed until the time of the Maharil, who was asked the following question:

"Should someone who is uncertain whether his father or mother is still alive recite kaddish?"

To this question, frequent in earlier times when cell phones were not so commonplace, the Maharil replied that he is not required to recite kaddish and he should assume that his parent is still alive (see Mishnah, Gittin 3:3). Once the parent reaches the age of eighty, one should view it as uncertain whether the parent is still alive. Upon this basis, I am aware of a gadol be'Yisrael who had escaped Hitler's Europe before the war, who began to recite kaddish for his parents once the Nazis invaded the part of Russia where his parents were living.

The Maharil continues that if there are two people in shul, one reciting kaddish for a deceased parent and one who is uncertain whether his parents are still alive, the second person should not recite kaddish. This is because of the halachic principle of ein safek motzi midei vadai, someone who has a questionable claim does not preempt someone who has a definite claim or right -- the person whose parents might still be alive should not recite kaddish, rather than someone whose parents are known to be deceased. This ruling of the Maharil assumes that kaddish is recited by only one person at a time.

The Maharil explains that, for this reason, he himself did not say kaddish when he was uncertain whether his parents were still alive. He then explains that someone who is not sure whether his parents are still alive and is capable to lead the services properly should lead the services in honor of his parents (Teshuvos Maharil #36).

Conclusions based on the Maharil

We see from the Maharil's discussion that:

- Only one person recites kaddish at a time.
- Someone with living parents should not recite mourner's kaddish because he is pre-empting mourners from reciting kaddish.
- When no mourner will be leading the services, someone uncertain if he is a mourner should do so, provided he can do the job properly.

Obligatory versus voluntary kaddish

The Maharil (Shu't Maharil Hachadoshos #28) was also asked how may a minor recite kaddish if it is a required part of davening, as only one obligated to fulfill a mitzvah may fulfill a mitzvah on behalf of others. The Maharil answered that the kaddeishim that are recited by the shaliach tzibur as part of davening cannot be recited by minors. These kaddeishim are obligatory and must be recited by an adult, who fulfills the mitzvah on behalf of the community. However, non-obligatory kaddeishim, such as kaddish derabbanan and the kaddeishim recited at the end of davening, may be recited by minors. As a curious aside, the Mesechta Sofrim (10:7) explains that these kaddeishim were established primarily as make-up for people who arrived late and missed the kaddeishim that are required. It is curious that, already in the time of the Maharil, people assumed that the mourner's kaddeishim are more important than those of the chazzan. The Maharil points out that this is incorrect, since the kaddeishim recited by the chazzan are required, and it is greater to perform a mitzvah that is required than something non-obligatory (gadol ha'metzuveh ve'oseh mimi she'eino metzuveh ve'oseh). There is greater merit to recite the kaddeishim of the chazzan that are part of davening.

Since minors cannot be chazzan, the Maharil rules that they should be called up for maftir, which a minor may receive, since they thereby recite borchu in front of the tzibur.

Mourner's kaddish on weekdays

It appears from the Maharil's responsum that, prior to his era, kaddish yasom was recited only on Shabbos and Yom Tov. In his day, a new custom had just begun in some communities to recite mourner's kaddish on weekdays. The new custom enabled minors to recite kaddish daily and accommodated adults whom the tzibur did not want leading services.

Which kaddeishim should be said?

The Maharil writes that although the following kaddeishim are not required but customary, they should still be recited: after a shiur is completed, after bameh madlikin on Friday evening, and after pesukim are recited, such as when we recite kaddish after aleinu and the shir shel yom. He rules that someone whose parents are still alive may recite these kaddeishim. However, if his parents do not want him to recite these kaddeishim, he should not.

One at a time

At this point, let us address our opening question: Is it better that each

mourner recite only one kaddish, or that all the mourners recite all the kaddeishim?

It appears that, initially, whoever wanted to recite what we call today the mourner's kaddeishim would do so. Knowing the story of Rabbi Akiva, it became an element of competition, with different people trying to chap the mitzvah. This situation sometimes engendered machlokes and chillul Hashem. To resolve this problem, two approaches developed for dealing with the issue. Sefardim followed the approach that all who wanted to say kaddish recited it in unison. This practice is praised by Rav Yaakov Emden in his commentary on the siddur (at the end of Aleinu). Among Ashkenazim, the approach used was to establish rules of prioritization, whereby one person at a time recited kaddish.

These prioritization rules are discussed and amplified by many later Ashkenazi authorities, implying that the early Ashkenazi world had only one person reciting kaddish at a time. We do not know exactly when the custom began to change, but by the late eighteenth/early nineteenth century, several major Ashkenazi authorities, among them the Chayei Odom (30:7) and the Chasam Sofer (Shu't Orach Chayim #159; Yoreh Deah #345), discuss a practice whereby kaddish was recited by more than one person simultaneously. About this time, we find another custom in some communities, in which the mourner's kaddish was said by only one person, but where everyone who chose could join in the recital of a kaddish derabbanan that was recited at the end of the daily morning prayer (see Shu't Binyan Tziyon #1:122), presumably after the rav taught a shiur in halachah.

Merged community

With this background, we can understand the following mid-nineteenth century responsum. An Ashkenazi community had two shullen and several shteiblach. The main shul was in serious disrepair, so an agreement was made to close all the smaller shullen in order to pool resources and invest in one large, beautiful new shul and have no other minyanim. Part of the plan was that the new shul would permit all mourners to recite all the kaddeishim in unison. Subsequently, some individuals claimed that the community should follow the practice of the Rema and the Magen Avraham of prioritizing the recital of kaddish and having one person say it at a time. The community leaders retorted that this would create machlokes, since there would be only one shul and many people would like to say more kaddeishim than they can under the proposed system. Apparently, the dispute even involved some fisticuffs. The community sent the shaylah to Rav Ber Oppenheim, the rav and av beis din of Eibenschutz. He felt that the community practice of having all the mourners recite kaddish together should be maintained, but first wrote an extensive letter clarifying his position, which he sent to Rav Yaakov Ettlinger, the premier halachic authority of central Europe at the time. I will refer to Rav Ettlinger by the name he is usually called in yeshiva circles, the Aruch Laneir, the name of his most famous work, the multi-volumed Aruch Laneir commentary on much of Shas. The Aruch Laneir's reply was subsequently published in his work of responsa called Shu't Binyan Tziyon.

The Aruch Laneir contended that one should not change the established minhag of Germany and Poland, in practice for more than three hundred years, in which only one person recites kaddish at a time. He further notes that, although the Yaavetz had praised the practice that several people recite kaddish in unison, the Yaavetz himself had lived in Altoona, Germany, where the accepted practice was that only one person said kaddish at a time. (The Aruch Laneir notes that he himself was the current rav of Altoona and had been so already for several decades.)

Furthermore, the Aruch Laneir contends that one cannot compare Ashkenazic to Sefardic observance for a practical reason. The Sefardim are accustomed to praying in unison, and therefore, when they say kaddish, everyone exhibits great care to synchronize its recital. When Ashkenazim attempt to recite kaddish in unison, no one hears the kaddeishim. The Aruch Laneir notes that when the kaddish derabbanan is recited by all mourners, the result is a cacophony. He writes that he wishes he could abolish this custom, since, as a result, no one hears or responds appropriately to kaddish.

In conclusion, the Aruch Laneir is adamant that where the custom is that one person at a time recite kaddish, one may not change the practice. On the other hand, we have seen that other authorities cite a custom whereby all the mourners recite kaddish in unison.

Conclusion: How does kaddish work?

The Gemara (Yoma 86a) records that any sin that a person commits in this world, no matter how grievous, will be atoned if the person does teshuvah. This does not mean that the teshuvah accomplishes atonement without any suffering. Some sins are so serious that a person must undergo suffering in this world, in addition to performing teshuvah, before he is forgiven.

The greatest sin a person can be guilty of is chillul Hashem. Only teshuvah, suffering, and the individual's eventual demise will be sufficient to atone for this transgression. Thus, a person's death may result from his having caused a chillul Hashem.

The Maharal of Prague had a brother, Rav Chayim, who authored a work entitled Sefer Hachayim, in which he writes that most people die because they made a chillul Hashem at some point in their life. The reason a mourner recites kaddish is to use the parent's death as a reason to create kiddush Hashem – by reciting kaddish – thus, atoning for the original chillul Hashem (Sefer Hachayim, end of chapter 8). May we all merit creating kiddush Hashem in our lives.

Parshat Behar: Mitzvot of Shev'it and Yovel

by Rabbi Eitan Mayer

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

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

A LOOK AT THE TEXTUAL LANDSCAPE:

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

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

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

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

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

THE HOLINESS THEME:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

MY PET THEORY ABOUT KEDUSHA (AGAIN):

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

KEDUSHA AND RESTRICTION:

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

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

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

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

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

The connection between restrictions and kedusha is quite direct:

Kedusha = Dedication --> Restricted Access.

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

HILLUL:

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

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

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

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

THE KEDUSHA OF YOVEL AND SHEMITA:

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

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

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

In other words, Shemita and Yovel bring us:

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

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

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

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

VAYIKRA 25:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A LOOK AT THE BOOKENDS:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

MEETING THE CHALLENGE:

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

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

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

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

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

HINTS FROM THE RAMBAM:

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

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

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

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

[See also 4:27, 8:18]

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

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

TWO SIDES OF A COIN:

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

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

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

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

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

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

Rambam, Laws of Fast Days, Chapter 1:

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

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

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

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

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

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

Shabbat Shalom

****

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

Parshas Behar: Sh'Mittah And Sinai

By Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

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

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

II. RASHI'S ANSWER

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

IV. TWO KINDS OF SANCTITY

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

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

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

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

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

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