

### **Potomac Torah Study Center**

Vol. 12 #31, May 23-24, 2025; 26 Iyar 5785; Behar - Bechukotai 5785; Mevarchim HaHodesh Yom Yerushalayim is 28 Iyar, Sunday night and Monday

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

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

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**May Hashem protect Israel and Jews everywhere during 5785. May Hashem's protection shine on all of Israel, the IDF, and Jews throughout the world. May the remaining hostages soon come home, hostilities cease, and a new era bring security and rebuilding for both Israel and all others who genuinely seek peace. The murder Wednesday night of two staff members of the Israeli Embassy outside the Washington, DC Jewish Museum is a shocking reminder that terrorists attack whenever and wherever they can, even in the heart of the United States, very close to the seat of the American government. Baruch Dayan Emet.**

**Note: for more about the murdered couple, see:**

<https://www.nytimes.com/2025/05/22/world/middleeast/israel-embassy-dc-shooting-victims-sarah-milgrim-yaron-lischinsky.html>

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*In a devastating act of antisemitic violence, two dedicated Israeli embassy staff members, Yaron Lischinsky and Sarah Milgrim, were fatally shot outside the Capital Jewish Museum in Washington, D.C. [May 21, 2025] They were not only dedicated diplomats serving the State of Israel, Yaron and Sarah were a couple, planning to get engaged next week in Jerusalem. Their tragic loss shook the entire global Jewish community. May their memory be a blessing.*

*The attacker, who shouted "Free, Free Palestine!" as he opened fire and stormed into the museum, committed a vile attack of terror. His act targeted more than just two lives, it was aimed at everything we stand for: peace, dignity, and the shared values of our people. He was apprehended at the scene.*

*This tragedy is a stark reminder of the dangers faced daily by Israeli diplomats and Jewish communities worldwide. Yaron and Sarah were ambassadors for our nation, working for a safer Israel, more hopeful future for our people.*

*In their memory, and in defiance of the hatred that took them from us, we ask you to stand with us. . .*

Email by Yoni Gilboa, Director of Zaka Tel-Aviv (May 22, 2025)

Sefer Vayikra closes this Shabbat with Behar - Bechukotai. Most of the parsha consists of the Tochechah, chapter 26, a short list of blessings for observing Hashem's mitzvot and a much longer list of horrible curses that God would send should we ignore the mitzvot, particularly the mitzvot of shmettah and yovel. (Shmettah is the requirement of not planting and caring for crops in Israel every seventh year, and yovel is the 50<sup>th</sup> year, after seven cycles of shmettah – when land ownership would revert back to the original tribes who received the land at the time of Yehoshua, all debts would be cancelled, and all slaves would go free.)

The ending parsha of Vayikra brings together numerous themes that we read over and over again in the Torah. For example, in creating a space for humans to live next to God's world, Hashem rests on the seventh day – and commands that we humans observe Shabbat and use the time to build a relationship with Him. Shabbat focuses on the importance of the number seven, a number that comes up over and over again. Our holy days have connections to seven – Pesach and Sukkot each last seven days. Shavuot comes the day after seven Shabbats (seven weeks of counting the Omer.) Every seven days we observe Shabbat, and every seven years we observe shmettah. After every seven shmettah years, the next year is yovel, the jubilee time when ownership of land in Israel revert to the original owner families from the time of Yehoshua. Slaves go free, and debts are cancelled. This structure compensates for misfortune that would otherwise bring some families into permanent debt, bankruptcy, and for some of them, slavery. Yovel is an automatic economic reset – every fifty years, families go back to the original distribution of freedom and land, thus receiving an automatic restart and new opportunity to prosper with the most fortunate families.

The Torah repeatedly commands that we take care of widows, orphans, immigrants, and the poor – because "I am Hashem" – because that is our duty to God. We must be Kadosh, because Hashem, our God, is Kadosh. Kadosh requires that we take care of those less fortunate than we are – working for a better world is an obligation for all of us.

Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander updates the meaning of the double parsha to Yirmiyahu's words in the Haftorah. The tochechah discusses the rewards and punishments for following or not following the Torah's mitzvot, especially the mitzvot of shmettah and yovel. Rabbi Brander observes that the rewards and punishments accrue to all Jews in Israel as a society, not as individuals. Is there a concept of individual reward and punishment? Following the Talmud, Kiddushin 39b, the rewards the Torah mentions come when the nation as a whole lives by Torah values. Individual rewards, however, come in the world to come. There is no promise of individual reward in our lifetimes.

Are the rewards for living a life dedicated to Torah values to reach us as individuals only after our lifetimes? That concept could be very depressing. Even so, I still find an incentive to follow Torah values, even giving virtually no weight to my place in the world to come. I have children and grandchildren, and I have faith that I shall have future generations of Jewish descendants – even if they only come after I die. Working for a better world for my descendants is important to me. Also, anything I can do to make the world a better place for my generation and future generations – especially in terms of working to reduce the amount of anti-Semitism in the world – is important to me. Helping work for a better world for my people is important to me – even if the impact will go primarily or almost exclusively to others and after my time.

We are all in shock after the brutal murder of Yaron Lischinsky and Sarah Milgrim the night before I am writing these words. The tochechah reminds us of the promise for a better world for us if we follow Hashem's mitzvot. Perhaps if the vast majority of Jews follow the mitzvot, brutal murders of our outstanding young people will diminish greatly in number. May we dedicate us to living better lives, doing more for fellow Jews and neighbors, and the near future bring far fewer enemies of our people.

My beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, was devoted to Israel and visited at least twice a year. When we visited Israel, we always stopped and visited with members of his family – his parents when they were alive, and his sister and brother-in-law even more frequently. His love of the land and its amazing produce testified to God's promise of abundant harvests every sixth year, to ensure food for the citizens during every shmettah year.

Shabbat Shalom,  
Hannah and Alan

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

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

Shabbat Shalom

Hannah & Alan

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### **Haftarat Parshat Behar-Bechukotai: Individual Responsibility, Collective Rewards**

By Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander \* 5785 / 2025  
President and Rosh HaYeshiva, Ohr Torah Stone

*Dedicated dedicated in memory of Israel's murdered and fallen, for the return of our hostages still in Gaza, for the refuah shlayma of our wounded in body or spirit, and for the safety of our brave IDF soldiers.*

*Dvar Torah this week dedicated in honor of the upcoming marriage of Elana Weiss & Effie Landau.\*\**

Parshat Bechukotai opens with a powerful promise: *“If you walk in My statutes... I will give your rains in their season, the land shall yield its produce, and the trees shall yield their fruit.”* This covenantal structure is echoed in its inverse later in the parsha’s tokhecha – the section of rebuke – which warns of the consequences when the nation turns away from God. These blessings and curses (the tokhecha) are overwhelmingly national in scope: they describe what happens to Am Yisrael collectively when we are faithful to God — or when we are not.

This emphasis on the collective fate of the Jewish people invites us to consider how divine reward and punishment function on a national versus an individual level. This contrast is sharpened in this week’s Haftorah from Yirmiyahu chapters 16–17. On the one hand, we are told that *“cursed is a person who trusts in humankind,”* 17:5( and *“blessed is a person who trusts in God,”* )17:7( pointing to individual spiritual responsibility. But the very same prophecy also includes a national warning: *“The guilt of Judah is inscribed with a stylus of iron, engraved with an adamant point on the tablet of their hearts.”* )17:1( How do we reconcile these two elements of divine providence, the individual and the collective?

Perhaps an explanation can be derived from the striking assertion in the Talmud, Kiddushin 39b: *“There is no reward for mitzvot in this world”* — and the rabbinic commentaries on it. At first glance, this appears to contradict the literal text of Bechukotai, where tangible blessings like agricultural prosperity seem to follow directly from adherence to mitzvot. What might our Sages have had in mind?

In his commentary Maharsha, Rabbi Shmuel Eidels resolves this by distinguishing between the types of reward. He clarifies that the Talmud’s assertion that there is no reward in this world refers specifically to individual reward — the eternal, spiritual compensation which is reserved for the World to Come. On the other hand, the material prosperity

described in Bechukotai reflects communal reward; **when the nation as a whole lives according to Torah values, there is an additional societal blessing in the form of rain or abundance. Individuals reap the benefit of these rewards, but the personal reward lies in the spiritual development of our soul – here and in the after-life.** ]emphasis added[

This distinction has profound implications. In moments of personal hardship, it is natural to wonder: Why am I not being rewarded for my efforts? The Torah's answer, painful but empowering, is that personal righteousness is not always met with immediate material reward. But when we act in unity, as a nation faithful to the Torah, we unlock divine blessing into our collective destiny.

Parshat Bechukotai and its Haftarah call on us to see beyond ourselves. Our spiritual lives are not only about personal growth, but about shaping a society worthy of God's presence. The blessings of rain and peace are not rewards for individual piety — they are manifestations of a healthy, covenantal relationship between God and His people.

May we merit to build such a community, where our Torah is not only studied but lived; where our shared commitment brings light not only in the World to Come but to this world as well.

\* President and Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone, 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@otsny.org](mailto:ohrtorahstone@otsny.org) or 212-935-8672. **Ohr Torah Stone is in the midst of its spring fund-raising drive. Please support this effort with Donations to 49 West 45<sup>th</sup> Street #701, New York, NY 10036.**

\*\* All decent people mourn victims of cruel anti-Semitic attacks, such the murder of Sarah Milgrim & Yaron Lischinsky, two young Israeli Embassy staff members Wednesday night in front of the Israeli Museum in Washington, DC. We Jews work for a better future thanks to the efforts of the finest of our young people, as they prepare for a better life and better world. Elana Weiss & Effie Landau are a very special part of the Jewish response to hatred in the world. Mazel-Tov on their forthcoming marriage. ]note from the editor[

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## Behar Bechukosai: Then Peace Has a Chance

By Rabbi Label Lam © 5767

*If you will follow My decrees and observe My commandments and perform them, then I will provide your rains in their time, and the land will give its produce and the tree of the field will give its fruit. Your threshing will last until the vintage and the vintage will last until the sowing; you will eat your bread to satiety and you will dwell securely in the land. I will grant )Shalom( Peace in the land.... )Vayikra 26:3-6(*

*If you will follow My decrees: That you should be striving in Torah learning. )Rashi(*

*I will grant Shalom: Maybe you'll say well there's plenty of food and there's drink too but you should know that without peace there is nothing. All these things and then "I will grant you peace" teaches us that peace is equivalent to everything. And so is written "Who makes peace and creates bad" )Isaiah 45:7( )Rashi(*

What is this crucial ingredient called "Shalom"? How do we define it. Sometime the Torah itself can be used as a self-referential dictionary. By observing the context of a word's use we can discern its meaning. How so?

Quoting the entire verse from Isaiah that Rashi refers to above, *"Who forms light and creates darkness, Who makes peace and creates bad, I am HASHEM Who does all these!"* the Talmud )Bava Basra 58A( infers that elements are presented in contrast to one another. Just as dark and light are opposites so "Shalom" – peace and bad are opposites.

That's sounds strange at first. The opposite of peace might be war and the opposite of bad we might presume to be good but that peace is the opposite of bad is a new angle, a different perspective on one or both of those extra big words. What is "bad" and what is "peace"?

The Chovos HaLevavos with his "Eye Hospital" analogy explains how, when untutored, people naturally miss out on perceiving the continuous flow of goodness from HASHEM, because of an intense preoccupation with and a profound misunderstanding about the tribulations of life.

*"How closely they resemble in this regard to blind men who are brought to a house prepared for them with everything that could benefit them; everything in it is arranged perfectly; it is fully equipped and ideally suited to benefit them and provide for their welfare. In addition, effective medications and a skilled physician to administer them are provided for their treatment, so that their sight might be restored.*

*Nevertheless, the men neglect to undergo treatment for their eyes and disregard the advice of the physician who had been treating them. They walk about the house handicapped greatly by their blindness, stumbling over the very things that had been prepared for their benefit, falling on their faces; some suffer bruises, and others broken limbs.*

*They suffer much and their troubles are compounded. They complain bitterly about the owner and builder of the house and condemn his actions. In their eyes he has been negligent and a poor leader, and they believe that his motivation had not been to do them good and show them kindness but to cause them pain and injury. This leads them to deny the benevolence and the kindness of the owner."*

I had a very thoughtful phone conversation just the other day with someone suffering with the subject of suffering. It's not to be taken lightly. Near the end I quoted the oft repeated phrase, *"If someone wants to believe in G-d he has to explain the suffering that goes on in the world but if he wants to not believe in a Creator then he has to explain everything else."* I left him with a challenge-a homework assignment to guestimate the proportion of "Goodness" to "Bad". I have not heard back from him yet! Not a bad question to ponder! Hmmm!

The situation of bad is actually a lack of harmony – "peace" not a void of good. All the ingredients for improvement and harmonious living are there whether misappropriated or not. Like navigating in traffic, when all drivers are careful and constantly mindful of their responsibilities – "following My decrees" – "striving to learn," "bad" stays home and **then peace has a chance.**

Good Shabbos!

<https://torah.org/torah-portion/dvartorah-5772-behar/>

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### **A Thought on the Parsha (Behar Behukotai): Has our Relationship Lost its Sizzle?**

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

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

The answer is found in the first half of the verse: things may change once God has put God's Tabernacle in our midst, and not necessarily for the better. We know that we are lacking as long as we are without a mishkan, a physical embodiment of God's presence, a concrete and institutionalized structure of kedusha. We understand that we have not yet achieved our full religious potential, and that we must continue to strive and reach. Without a mishkan, we will live our lives driven by the mandate of kedoshim ti'hiyu, you shall become holy, striving to better actualize the divine within ourselves, knowing that we will never reach our ultimate goal.

Once God's mishkan is in our midst, however, we may think that we have arrived. If God dwells among us, then there is no striving left do. We are fully holy, and we have the mishkan to prove it. With this attitude comes great danger, for if we are already holy, we will not stop to take stock of ourselves and our actions. We will not ask if there is more that we could be doing, if we are doing everything properly, or if we are being properly responsive to the world around us. We will become religiously complacent and self-satisfied. If we go down this path, we will hurt ourselves and others. We will come to believe that we are the only ones with the truth. Our sole mission will be to protect the truth and our mishkanim — our concretized embodiments of God's presence — against defilement and impurity. We will divide the world into insiders and outsiders, with outsiders seen as people of no consequence at best, and at worst, as dangerous, threatening, and even evil. And it does not end there. The institutionalization of God's presence can also lead to great corruption, as with the sons of Eli (I Shmuel 2) and as we see today when religion institutions gain power over people's lives.

God's placing of God's mishkan in our midst, then, is a two-edged sword, a blessing that entails a very real risk. Seen this way, we can understand why the verse continues, *"And my soul will not abhor you."* This is not a consequence of what has preceded but, rather, a second blessing. You will be blessed that, even with the mishkan in your midst, you will not become complacent, sanctimonious, and corrupt. You will not become a people abhorrent to God, a people who have abandoned the path of true kedusha and become so self-righteously satisfied with their own religiosity. You will succeed at having God's mishkan while remaining true to God's Torah.

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

In fact, this word, hithalekh, to move about, occurs multiple times in Breishit in the context of the human relationship to God. The first occurrence is in the story of Gan Eden, when Adam and Eve hear the sound of God moving about, mit'haleikh, in the garden. The sense of an imminent encounter with God forces them to hide out of shame; they look at themselves honestly, knowing that God will soon be looking at them. Perhaps more to the point are all the instances in which becoming righteous is defined as walking before God: *"And Hanokh walked before, hit'haleikh, God"* (Breishit 5:22); *"Before God did Noah walk"* (Breishit 6:9); *"God appeared to Avram and said to him: Walk before Me and be perfect"* (Breishit 17:1); and finally, *"And [Yaakov] blessed Yosef and said to him: The Lord before Whom my fathers have walked..."* (Breishit 48:15).

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

The Orthodox community has fallen short of this vision of a vibrant, dynamic religiosity. Orthodoxy, with its various mishkanim, its institutionalized embodiments, often leads to stasis, complacency, and religious self-satisfaction. Only by reintroducing the mandate to be mit'halekh — to move, grow, and respond to the outside world and all its contemporary challenges — can we hope to maintain a true relationship with God. Only a religious vision such as this can allow us to connect to all those who have become alienated, who have been told, implicitly or explicitly, that they have no place in our mishkan, that they are threats, that they are not worthy and not wanted. Only such a religious vision will bring life and

growth to those who are committed to Torah and mitzvot but who see in religion only the forms, only preserving and protecting rather than moving and growing.

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

Shabbat Shalom!

\* [Editor's note: Have we Jews made progress or gone backward in the 11 years since Rabbi Linzer wrote these words?]

From my archives

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## **Good Intentions Are Not Good Enough: Thoughts for Behar/Behukotai**

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel \*

I once asked a member of our Congregation if he would attend our weekday morning minyan and become part of our growing "minyan team." He responded: "*I would love to attend minyan, but I am not able to do so since I must be at my office early in the morning. With the Lord's help, I'll join the minyan in the future.*"

Some years later, when I learned that this gentleman had just retired from his work, I called him again, inviting him to attend our weekday morning minyan. He answered: "*For all these years, I've had to wake up early to go to my office. Now that I'm retired, I can finally sleep late. So I'm not able to attend morning minyan now, but with the Lord's help, I'll join the minyan in the future.*"

This gentleman thought that "*with the Lord's help*" he would one day attend minyan. That day never came. The man passed away years later, without ever having made it to our minyan even once.

In *The Heart of Man*, Erich Fromm wrote that "*most people fail in the art of living not because they are inherently bad or so without will that they cannot live a better life; they fail because they do not wake up and see when they stand at a fork in the road and have to decide.*"

We all may have good intentions; but we also have the uncanny ability to come up with rationalizations why we cannot fulfill these good intentions. We find excuses justifying why we can't attend minyan, or can't contribute more to charity, or can't spend time learning Torah, or can't find more time to spend with our families, or can't invite guests to our homes etc. We fail, not because we are bad, but because we don't take control of our lives, we don't have the will-power to make decisions and to act on them. We drift along in our routines, hoping that "*with the Lord's help*", we'll change our patterns for the better in the future.

This week's Parasha brings us to the end of the book of Vayikra. It is customary in some congregations for congregants to call out at the conclusion of Behukotai: "*Hazak ve-nit-hazak, hizku ve-ya-ametz levavhem kol ha-myahalim la-do-nai.*" Be strong, and let us strengthen ourselves; be strong and let your heart have courage, all you who hope in the Lord. This is a way of celebrating the completion of a book of the Torah, and encouraging us to continue in the path of Torah study so we may complete other books as well.

I think that a phrase from the above-quoted text can be interpreted as follows: hizku – strengthen yourselves, be resolute; ve- ye-ametz levavhem – and God will give courage to your hearts. **First, you need to strengthen yourselves, make decisions, start to take action. Then, God will give you the added fortitude to fulfill your goals. We need to take**

**the initiative; we need to demonstrate resolution; we need to assume responsibility. If we strengthen ourselves, we may trust that the Almighty will give us added strength. [emphasis added]**

If people fail in life because they don't realize they are at a fork in the road and must make a decision, they succeed in life because they do realize that they must take responsibility and must act – and they do!

\* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals and rabbi emeritus of the historic Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue of New York City.

<https://www.jewishideas.org/good-intentions-are-not-good-enough-thoughts-parashat-behukotai>

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## **Israel's Distorted Image in the World**

By David Suissa \*

Publisher and Editor, The Jewish Journal of Los Angeles (September 21, 2024)

When we discuss Israel's image, we rarely mention the obvious: Since the founding of the state, Israel's image has been dominated by white Ashkenazim: From Ben Gurion to Weitzmann to Dayan to Golda to Peres to Begin to Rabin to Herzog to Sharon to Olmert to Livni to Bennett to Lapid to Gantz to Gallant to Smotrich to Levin and, of course, to Netanyahu and countless others, the white Ashkenazic Jew has been front and center in the global media coverage of Israel.

This is absolutely not a criticism; it's more of an observation. But it's also a missed opportunity for those who worry about improving Israel's image. There's a tendency among those in the "hasbara" world to take the idea of image figuratively. That is, when they talk about Israel's image, they don't mean a real image; they mean a general perception of Israel that needs to be improved.

This is how we end up obsessed with talking points and arguments. We need facts! We need education! We need to correct the lies!

Yes, but somehow, no one ever says we need new pictures. We assume, in other words, that the best way to fix Israel's image is through words and arguments rather than through actual images.

The irony is that as we exert ourselves to correct the lies against Israel, one epic lie remains untouched: The lie that Israel is a white country. But where do we think this lie comes from? It comes mostly from Israel itself, from the simple fact that virtually every person who represents Israel in the media is a white Ashkenazi. The good news is that this can be fixed by being more accurate and recognizing the multicultural diversity that makes Israeli society so vibrant.

"Only about 30% of Israeli Jews are Ashkenazic, or the descendants of European Jews," Hen Mazzig wrote a few years ago in The Los Angeles Times. "I am baffled as to why mainstream media and politicians around the world ignore or misrepresent these facts and the Mizrahi story. Perhaps it's because our history shatters a stereotype about the identity of my country and my people."

Very true, but let's recognize that this stereotype is also what Israel presents to the world. It would be a lot harder for the mainstream media to ignore Israel's multicultural nature if Mizrahim and other Israelis of color would be fully integrated in its media relations. I was reminded of this at a talk last Friday by Dr. Duygu Atlas, a Muslim-Israeli historian who lives in

Tel Aviv. She was discussing a new initiative, Muslims Connect with Israel (MCI), that she hopes will change the way Israelis are perceived and understood by Muslim societies.

She kept coming back to this key point: The best way to talk about Israel and break down stereotypes is to show its cultural and ethnic diversity.

In an ideal colorblind world, maybe none of this would matter. But that's not the world we live in. Color matters. Culture matters. Diversity matters. If Israel is so ethnically diverse, why not show it?

(Indeed, the same applies to American Jewry and its leadership: If Jews in America today are so ethnically diverse, why not show it? Why not integrate Mizrahim and Jews of color in the communal leadership? We like to go on about the importance of diversity and inclusion, but what are we doing at the leadership level to show a more diverse and accurate Jewish face in the mainstream media?)

Here's a suggestion for pro-Israel activists on social media: Fewer words, more pictures. In addition to your regular talking points, blast your networks with hundreds of images of Israelis from all corners of the globe who are anything but the white Jewish stereotype people see in the media.

Same goes for philanthropists who buy billboards and advertising to "make the case for Israel"; a picture is worth a thousand clever phrases. Use striking images that celebrate the ethnic kaleidoscope of the Jewish state. Title it "Israel in Living Color." Nothing breaks the ice like true ethnic diversity.

For the Israeli government, if they want their communication to have more impact, there's no better place to start than to have "spokespeople in living color." "In living color" is the true face of Israel and the Jewish people. White is not. "In living color" adds complexity and nuance to the conversation about Israel and the many challenges facing the Jewish world.

"I am Mizrahi," Mazzig wrote, "as are the majority of Jews in Israel today. We are of Middle Eastern and North African descent."

After 76 years of conveying one image based mostly on one ethnicity, it's high time Israel and world Jewry show their true colors to the world.

\* The Los Angeles Jewish Journal is the largest Jewish weekly in the country. For the past 17 years, David Suissa has been writing a weekly column in the Journal that earned him the "Best Columnist" award by the L.A. Press Club and first prize for Editorial writing by the American Jewish Press Association. This article appears in issue 45 of *Conversations*, the journal of the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals. [Note: title for essay by the Editor]

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**Reconnect, Recharge, Repeat**  
by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine \*

*Dedicated in Memory of Mr. David Rhine Sholomo Dovid ben Avraham Yitzchak z.l.*

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

Shemita is a fascinating mitzva which directs the Jewish farmer to refrain from working his land for an entire year. The Medrash (Tehillim 103) speaks with admiration about the farmer's observance. Imagine a person dropping his livelihood for a year for this observance. Such behavior is angelic, an expression of enormous inner strength.

Interestingly, when the Torah introduces this mitzva it tells us that it was given at Sinai. The commentaries wonder, "Weren't all the mitzvos given at Sinai?" What is the connection between the mitzva of Shemita and Sinai?

If we allow ourselves to picture the great event at Sinai when the Torah was given to us, we will certainly savor the momentous event. Yet, lingering in our minds, and certainly in the minds of those who experienced it, is a question. At Sinai Hashem spoke with us directly. We were so present and our Nishamos so in focus that we were able to hear Him. "What must we do to remember this day and keep the connection alive?"

Certainly, our daily observance and Torah study is an ongoing connection. But there are limitations. Compared to the experience at Sinai, which was all encompassing, no matter how much we try, daily experiences with life's distractions and busyness make it hard to focus.

Shemita provides the farmer with an opportunity to reconnect with Hashem in a way that has similarities with Sinai. The distractions of his daily farming responsibilities are put on hold. For an entire year he is able to spiritually reconnect and recharge. Unlike his daily Torah study, which is of shorter duration and might be intruded upon by thoughts of distraction, Shemita carves out space to really connect. Freed from the responsibilities of farming, the farmer was able to devote himself to Torah study and make the Beis Medrash his second home. Unlike the limited daily study which he always maintained, Shemita provided a far deeper and more meaningful connection without distractions, rejuvenating the high-level connection we had at Sinai.

Not all of us are farmers and not all of us can experience the serene gift of the Shemita connection. But the principle of Shemita applies in all our relationships. In addition to the basic time we allocate to keep any relationship alive, there are times that we can deeply reconnect and recharge if we strategically put our minds to it.

I have seen, for example, people show up devotedly to Chavrusa learning. But they place their phone prominently on the table (on vibrate, of course) anticipating an incoming call. While their learning and devotion is treasured, I estimate that if the phone was truly off and hidden, they could probably connect to their learning and Chavrusa more deeply. Even in our time it is possible to savor a few minutes of Shemita-type distraction-free connection.

The Seforno captures this concept so perceptively regarding Shabbos. On the verse (Shemos 20:8) telling us to remember Shabbos all week to sanctify it, the Seforno writes: Remember Shabbos all week in your business dealings; structure them in a way that you will be able to forget them on Shabbos and experience Shabbos with focus and without distraction.

Predictably, just as these principles apply in our relationship with Hashem and that which is holy, they apply in our human relationships as well. There are many things we do to maintain a relationship. But there are times that the Shemita principle of a deep meaningful experience without distraction is appropriate. We live in a world that would gladly keep us engaged 24/7 if we allowed it. Carving out just a few minutes of focused time with a parent, spouse, child, or friend can be viewed as a great accomplishment. And a necessary one.

The farmer who observes Shemita and thereby makes deep connection time with Hashem is described as possessing great inner strength. Certainly, it takes great inner strength to place his livelihood on hold, observe the mitzva, and reconnect so admirably. Yet, we can only wonder if Shemita is not only a result but also the cause. It is by reconnecting and recharging without distraction that we provide ourselves with great inner strength through and in all our relationships.

With heartfelt blessings for a wonderful Shabbas.

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

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## **Behar – 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.

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

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### **Behar-Bechukotai**

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia \*

[I do not have a new Dvar Torah from Rabbi Ovadia for Bechukotai. Watch this space for his insights most weeks.]

\* Judaic faculty, Ramaz High School, New York; also Torah VeAhava. Until recently, Rabbi, Beth Sholom Sephardic Minyan (Potomac, MD). Faculty member, AJRCA non-denominational rabbinical school. **Many of Rabbi Ovadia's Devrei Torah are now available on Sefaria:**

<https://www.sefaria.org/profile/haim-ovadia?tab=sheets> . The Sefaria articles usually include Hebrew text, which I must delete because of issues changing software formats.

**Many 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 protections for this material.**

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### **Reset Your Life**

By Rabbi Moshe Rube \*

Have you ever wished to hit the restart button on your life? Well in Judaism you can with the power of Yovel.

The Yovel is the Jubilee year, the 50th year, the end of the 7 x 7 year Sabbatical cycle. It's not only an extra year when we do no work on the land. We also cancel all debts, any owed services, and return all land to its original owners. That last part means that if one of the tribes of Israel sold their Biblically allotted portion to another tribe or family, that land would revert back to the original tribe. It's an interesting model which I will leave for greater economic minds than mine to analyse.

But what inspires me is this idea of a restart. We wipe out all the debts, and everyone starts again with their ancestral plot of land. It must have given the ancient Jews a sense of a new life -- God gave them a new chance with a clean slate on which to rewrite their story.

This week we celebrate the bat mitzvah of Eleanor Shenkin. A bat mitzvah, like the Yovel, is like starting your life anew. You enter from childhood with a clean slate and a new set of potential and responsibilities. It's a time where we celebrate, cheer and support our new Jewish adult as they take their first steps as independent members of our community.

Our blessing for Eleanor is that she fill her clean slate with joy, wisdom, compassion and dedication for the community that she now enters. May God bless her that she continue growing from strength to strength and accomplish all that she wishes for herself and her community. Mazal Tov Eleanor!

Shabbat Shalom.

\* Senior Rabbi of Auckland Hebrew Congregation, Remuera )Auckland(, New Zealand. Formerly Rabbi, Congregation Knesseth Israel )Birmingham, AL(. I reprinted part 1 last week for Mishpatim.

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## Rav Kook Torah

### Behar: Shemitah - Window to the Future

#### **I Suspicious Content[ Like the Garden of Eden**

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

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

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

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

#### **Elevating Agriculture**

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

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

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

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

<https://ravkooktorah.org/EMOR59.htm>

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### **Behar - Bechukotai: The Economics of Liberty (5775. 5782)**

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

The most surprising best-selling book in 2014 was French economist Thomas Piketty's *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*<sup>1</sup> – 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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup>

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.<sup>4</sup> You can have one or the other but not both: the more economic freedom, the less equality; the more equality, the less freedom. That was the key conflict of the Cold War era, between capitalism and communism. Communism lost the battle. In the 1980s, under Ronald Reagan in America, Margaret Thatcher in Britain, markets were liberalised, and by the end of the decade the Soviet Union had collapsed. But unfettered economic freedom produces its own discontents, and Picketty's book is one of several warning signs.

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

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

The Torah is also committed to the equal dignity of human beings in the image, and under the sovereignty, of God. That quest for equality was not fully realised in the biblical era. There were hierarchies in biblical Israel. Not everyone could be

a king; not everyone was a priest. But Judaism had no class system. It had no equivalent of Plato's division of society into men of gold, silver and bronze, or Aristotle's belief that some are born to rule, others to be ruled. In the community of the covenant envisaged by the Torah, we are all God's children, all precious in His sight, each with a contribution to make to the common good.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Second, the same applies to people:

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

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

Third, it tells us that economics is, and must remain, a discipline that rests on moral foundations. What matters to the Torah is not simply technical indices, such as the rate of growth or absolute standards of wealth, but the quality and

texture of relationships: people's independence and sense of dignity, the ways in which the system allows people to recover from misfortune, and the extent to which it allows the members of a society to live the truth that "*when you eat from the labour of your hands you will be happy and it will be well with you.*" )Ps. 128:2(

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

#### **FOOTNOTES:**

]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](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Jewish_Nobel_laureates).

<https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/behavior/the-economics-of-liberty/> Note: because Likutei Torah and the Internet Parsha Sheet, both attached by E-mail, normally include the two most recent Devrei Torah by Rabbi Sacks, I have selected an earlier Dvar.

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## **Are You Missing the Entire Point? An Essay on Parshat Bechukotai**

By Adin Even-Israel (Steinsaltz) © Chabad 2025)

### **"If you walk contrary with Me"**

The Tochechah section in Leviticus 26 contains several repeated expressions, including, "*If you walk contrary )bekerit with Me.*" According to an interpretation cited by Rashi, this refers to the sin of interpreting every event in life as an accident )mikreh(. When something bad happens, it is often easy to write it off as an accident. This can minimize the impact of such an event, disregarding its greater implications for one's life.

When one thinks of the last fifty or one hundred years, it is clear that this problem still exists in modern times. During this period, highly significant events occurred and various processes unfolded that greatly influenced the world and its inhabitants. Regarding each one of these events and processes, it is important to determine the lesson to take away from it. What can we learn from this? What is the conclusion to be drawn from it, and what should be changed as a result? These questions are relevant whether we are speaking about the Holocaust, about the establishment of the State of Israel, or about assimilation, which, although it may not seem as dramatic as the other events, is no less significant for the Jewish people in the long run.

Today, assimilation has reached proportions the likes of which we have not seen in over two thousand years. The majority of the Jewish people has no interest in Judaism. Not since the Hellenistic period, perhaps, have we lived in a time when to be a Jew is a matter of nationality, race, family, and other factors, but not a matter of religion. Statistics today show that for every second that goes by, there is approximately one less Jew in the world; not because he is killed, but because he assimilates among the non-Jews.

This situation, which pertains not just to anomalous individuals but to the entire community, is a tremendous change for us, and we have already forgotten how to deal with such a problem. We know how to deal with one apostate or what to do in the case of a minor misfortune, but how do we cope with the kind of traumatic phenomenon that affects an entire people? Assimilation today is an entirely different kind of problem from what we have dealt with in the past; it is a crisis like no other.

This situation is an example of what Parshat Bechukotai calls "*If you walk contrary with Me*"; it is clear that we have learned nothing from our history. To be sure, there are certainly individuals who have learned from past events. Those who abandoned their faith after the Holocaust had suffered through an incredible horror, and essentially said, "*Master of the Universe, we cannot carry on anymore; we cannot say that our suffering was simply bad luck. If You exist, You are not watching; and if You are watching, then such a thing would not have happened.*" These people did not "*walk contrary*"; they did not attribute world events to chance. The events in our lives have significance, and if they indeed have significance, one cannot remain complacent in response to them; one must draw conclusions from them. But the people as a whole did not respond like these individuals did; instead, they learned nothing at all.

There are those who see a bird flying and chirping and are able to understand what the bird is saying. Rabbi Nachman of Breslov said that after reaching the Land of Israel, he learned why a heap of straw lies in the street lengthwise and not widthwise. Granted, these are arcane matters. But in our case, we are not speaking here about a heap of straw in the street or about hearing a bird chirping. We are talking about catastrophes, events that have shocked the whole world. Yet no response, no conclusion, and no upshot has been drawn from all of this – nothing at all. Everyone carries on as before.

### **Blaming others**

When, occasionally, someone does attempt to infer some lesson, the conclusion drawn is generally that someone else is to blame. It is in our nature to look around and search for a guilty party, to determine on whom to pin the blame. Blaming others is often a way of saying that everything that happened proves that ones approach was correct, and it was this other person who caused all the world's problems. Thus, nowadays there are Jews whose main principle of faith is that Zionism brought about the Holocaust. On all the other principles they are willing to compromise, but not on this one.

Conversely, when something good happens, it is the common practice of many people to take credit for it. Others were useful by not getting in the way, or at best they may have helped a bit, but I was the one who saved the day, whether by reciting psalms or by the force of my gun.

One way or another, everything that happens, whether good or bad, makes no impact and effects no change. This is the precise definition of “*If you walk contrary with Me.*”

The parshah describes the horrifying consequences of this kind of attitude toward G d:

*If you walk contrary with Me and will not obey Me, I will go on smiting you...And I will send the beast of the field among you, which will rob you of your children, and destroy your cattle, and make you few in number, and your ways will become desolate. And if in spite of these things you will not be corrected unto Me, but walk contrary with Me...I in turn will smite you sevenfold for your sins. And I will bring upon you an avenging sword...When I break your staff of bread, ten women will bake your bread in one oven... and you will eat and not be satisfied...And you will eat the flesh of your sons.*<sup>1</sup>

All this because “*you walk contrary with Me.*”<sup>2</sup>

There is a kind of mechanism in man whereby even when he is hit with one affliction after another, he remains unmoved. When retribution comes, everyone immediately looks at his neighbor instead of deep within himself and, as a result, nothing changes. So long as one knows who caused all these afflictions, it is easy to live with all the troubles. In spite of all the admonishment, everything remains as it was before.

One who does not walk contrary is one who attaches meaning, importance, and significance to everything that happens around him. But learning a moral lesson regarding oneself and not automatically looking to someone else is very uncommon.

During the Sinai Campaign, the previous Belzer Rebbe, who was well known for his holiness and piety, stood for two full days in prayer. He was not suspected of being a Zionist, nor did he suddenly become one. But this was a time of great crisis in the world, and there are times when a person changes his mind in response to a crisis, even if not by dramatic declarations.

The hope is that, beyond a certain point, a person can no longer truly claim that a momentous event was a chance occurrence, and he will then understand that he requires rectification and that he must examine his deeds.

### **“We and our fathers have sinned”**

Toward the end of the Tochechah, there is another matter that is surprising in several respects: “*They will then confess their sins and the sins of their fathers, in that they were unfaithful to me and walked contrary with me.*”<sup>3</sup> The confession is not only for sins but also for “*walking contrary with G d*” – that is, for the imperviousness that does not allow one to see things correctly. But what is the meaning of “*they will then confess their sins and the sins of their fathers*”? Every time we recite the Viduy and confess our sins, we use this very formula: “*But we and our fathers have sinned,*” and perhaps for this very reason we no longer notice how odd it is. It makes perfect sense to confess one’s own sins, with which one is well acquainted. I have sinned, gone astray, transgressed. But what right do I have to drag my father and grandfather into a confession of these sins?

It is only natural for a person to automatically justify the practices to which he has grown accustomed. People often defend their dubious practices by claiming, “*This is how I was brought up, this is my style, this is my custom.*” Hence, when one wants to make a real confession, this confession cannot suffice with one’s own problems. One cannot merely atone for one’s own sins within one’s own sphere, claiming that these are the only things that fall within one’s sphere of responsibility and within the sphere of one’s teshuvah. Rather, one should consider that perhaps “*we and our fathers have*

*sinned.*" He should be willing to examine not only his own personal sins but also the sins of his fathers. Perhaps an error was made that encompasses more than what one did yesterday afternoon. One may have to go back five years, ten years, twenty years – perhaps there is an error that has persisted for generations.

Hence, the Torah says, "*Those of you who survive will deteriorate because of their iniquity in the lands of your enemies, and they will deteriorate also because of the iniquities of their fathers. They will then confess their sins and the sins of their fathers*"<sup>4</sup> – because that is part of the reckoning. True soul searching must include not only the personal picture but the broader picture.

Whenever any major event happens, one must always ask: What does this mean? What does it imply? What are its implications? Such a comprehensive examination is always challenging for everyone involved, but it must be done; for if it is not comprehensive, the whole examination loses its significance.

### **Abhorrence**

Not every sin is specified in the parshah, but there is one expression that appears twice, in two different but parallel contexts. At the beginning of the parshah, the Torah says, "*I will set My presence among you, and I will not abhor you,*"<sup>5</sup> and a few verses later, at the beginning of the Tochechah, it says, "*If you reject My statutes and abhor My laws, so that you do not observe all My commandments and you break My covenant;*"<sup>6</sup> and the expression recurs repeatedly.

Generally, when discussing the performance of the mitzvot, one speaks of the practical side: what one must do and what one must not do, and how one must act in regard to laws, statutes, commandments, or covenants. Here, however, the expression concerns a different aspect of the mitzvot. Were they abhorrent or loathsome to you? This is an expression that does not relate to one's actions. Abhorrence pertains to a sphere that is outside and beyond the performance itself. It asks: In what manner did you perform the mitzvot? What did you feel toward them? With what emotion did you perform them?

Again, the issue here is not the actions one has taken that led to a transgression. The question of abhorrence relates to a different aspect. The process that leads to "*you abhor My laws*" begins with indifference. Indifference is soon followed by loathing, a feeling that the mitzvot are repulsive. Thus, a person can continue doing all that is required of him in practice, and yet loathe and abhor it. He carries out all the orders, but does not care at all about them; in fact, they disgust him.

On the verse, "*because you did not serve G d your Lord with joy and with gladness over the abundance of all things,*"<sup>7</sup> it is said in the name of the Ari<sup>8</sup> that this is the root of, and reason for, all the punishments of the Tochechah. It is not because "*you did not serve G d your L rd*" but because "*you did not serve with joy.*" Because you do not serve G d with joy, you suffer the whole, long Tochechah, ninety-eight curses in all. The reason for this is that what lies beneath deeds that are not performed with joy is "*you reject My statutes and abhor My laws.*" It may seem unnecessary to perform a mitzva joyfully. Is it not enough to perform the laws in comprehensive detail? Must we be happy about it as well? The Torah's answer is yes – we must serve with joy.

In previous generations, when people would hear the recitation of the Tochechah in the synagogue – "*If you walk contrary with Me*"; "*If you reject and abhor*" – they would tremble in fear. In order to deflect self-scrutiny, many people would rationalize that the Tochechah applies only to the Torah reader, and not to them. This kind of thinking is vulgar and improper, not to mention ignorant. Nevertheless, it reflects an attitude of hearing the words of the Torah and experiencing a legitimate reaction – quivering with fear, feeling that the punishment described in the Tochechah may fall on him at any moment.

Nowadays, when the Tochechah is read in the synagogue, if the reader misses a cantillation mark or a vowel point, the congregants will stop him and tell him to repeat the verse with the proper pronunciation. The truth is that, in doing this, the congregants are following halachah. Why should this parshah be any different from all the other parashot in the Torah? Nevertheless, it should alarm us that the Tochechah, which used to inspire such terror, has been reduced to a zakef katan or a mappik heh.

Similarly, many people use the recitation of Shema simply as an opportunity to emphatically draw out the pronunciation of the letter zayin in the words "*lemaan tizkeru*;"<sup>9</sup> everything else stated in the Shema is irrelevant. "*You shall love G d your L rd*"<sup>10</sup> is unimportant; but to draw out the zayin – that is of real substance.

These examples show that many seemingly pious people do not actually care about the mitzvot; there is only contempt and abhorrence toward them.

### **"Why is the land destroyed?"**

In his introduction to *Tiferet Yisrael*, the Maharal writes at great length on the verse, "*Why is the land destroyed...Because they have forsaken My Torah.*"<sup>11</sup> The Talmud explains that "*they have forsaken My Torah*" means "*they did not first recite the blessing for the Torah.*"<sup>12</sup>

At first glance, the Talmud's explanation seems difficult to understand. For sins like bloodshed, forbidden sexual relationships, and idolatry, G d does not react so harshly. They are certainly considered serious sins, but they are not the sins for which the land was destroyed and the Temple razed. G d surely does not react this harshly to other offenses of similar insignificance. So **why is the sin of neglecting the blessing for the Torah treated with such severity?** ]emphasis added[

The Maharal answers that the people who "*did not first recite the blessing for the Torah*" were connected to the Torah without G d's involvement. They followed all the mitzvot, but did not appreciate the very root of the matter. G d was irrelevant to them, and it was because of this attitude that the land was destroyed.

The Midrash states that "*G d overlooked idolatry, forbidden sexual relationships, and bloodshed, but did not overlook contempt for the Torah.*"<sup>13</sup> It is not that G d forgave these major sins, only that these sins can always be rectified in this world or the next through teshuvah, whether it is on one's deathbed or even after his death. But **regarding the sin of contempt for the Torah there apparently is no atonement.** ]emphasis added[

The Talmud describes the Shechinah's departure from the Sanctuary, detailing its movement from station to station, corresponding to its exile: From the Ark-cover to the cherub, from the first cherub to the second cherub, from the second cherub to the threshold of the Holy of Holies, and from there to the courtyard and then to the Altar, and so forth, *until "it ascended and abode in its place."*<sup>14</sup> But why should we care that the Shechinah has departed? Why does it matter precisely where G d dwells? If He wants to live on the second floor, let Him live on the second floor; what does that have to do with me? This is the root of the problem: Man does not care about G d, and so he is left only with the external aspect of everything.

The Tochechah comes in response to this attitude of contempt and abhorrence – and not necessarily because of the performance. G d promises that if we follow His laws, He will look at us, "*and I will not abhor you.*"<sup>15</sup>

It could have been that when a person behaved in a certain way, he would simply make G d feel nauseous; G d would look at him and feel like vomiting. G d, therefore, promises: "*I will not abhor you.*" Despite all the sins, "*I will not reject them or abhor them.*"<sup>16</sup>

**FOOTNOTES:**

1. Lev. 26:21–29.
2. 26:27.
3. Lev. 26:40.
4. Lev. 26:39–40.
5. Lev. 26:11.
6. Lev. 26:15.
7. Deut. 28:47
8. Rabbi Isaac Luria.
9. Num. 15:40; the purpose of this custom is to ensure that the word does not sound like “tiskeru,” which would distort the meaning of the verse.
10. Deut. 6:5.
11. Jer. 9:11–12.
12. Bava Metzia 85b.
13. Lamentations Rabba, introduction, 2.
14. Rosh HaShana 31a
15. Lev. 26:11.
16. Lev. 26:44.

\* Rabbi Adin Even-Israel (Steinsaltz) 1937-2020 was internationally regarded as one of the leading rabbis of this century. The author of many books, he was best known for his monumental translation of and commentary on the Talmud.

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

by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky \*

### **Humility and Pride**

*G-d instructed Moses how to light the Candelabrum every day. He must set up the lamps upon the pure Candelabrum, before G-d, regularly. )Lev. 24:4(*

We are told that G-d chose to give the Torah on Mount Sinai because it was the lowest – i.e., humblest – mountain. But if G-d meant to teach us humility, He seemingly should have given the Torah in a valley. What is the paradox implied in the lowest of mountains?

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

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

--From Kehot's *Daily Wisdom 3*

\* An insight by **the Lubavitcher Rebbe** on parshat Va'eira from our *Daily Wisdom 3* by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky.

May G-d grant wisdom, strength and peace in the Holy Land.

Gut Shabbos,

Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman  
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**Covenant and Conversation**  
**Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z”l**

**The Limits of the Free Market**

As I was writing this essay, a newspaper headline caught my eye. It read: “The UK’s richest people have defied the double-dip recession to become even richer over the past year.”[1]

This is in spite of the fact that most people have become poorer, or at least seen their real income stay static, since the financial crisis of 2008. As the saying goes, “There’s nothing surer: the rich get rich and the poor get poorer.” It is to this phenomenon that the social legislation of Parshat Behar is addressed.

Leviticus 25 sets out a number of laws whose aim is to correct the tendency toward radical and ever-increasing inequality that result from the unfettered play of free market economics. So we have the Sabbatical year (Shemittah) in which debts were released, Hebrew slaves were set free, the land lay fallow and its produce, unharvested, belonged to everyone. There was the Jubilee year (Yovel) in which, with some exceptions, ancestral land returned to its original owners. There was the command to help the needy (“If any of your fellow Israelites become poor and are unable to support themselves among you, help them as you would a foreigner and stranger, so they can continue to live among you” Lev. 25:35.) And there was the obligation to treat slaves not slavishly but as “hired workers or temporary residents.” (Lev. 25:40)

As Heinrich Heine pointed out: “Moses did not want to abolish ownership of property; he wished, on the contrary, that everyone should possess something, so that no man might, because of poverty, be a slave with a slavish mind. Liberty was forever the ultimate thought of this great emancipator, and it still breathes and flames in all his laws which concern pauperism.” Israel Tabak, Judaic Lore in Heine, Johns Hopkins University Press reprints, 1979, 32.

Despite the sheer antiquity of these laws, time and again they have inspired those wrestling with issues of liberty, equity and justice. The verse about the Jubilee Year, (“Proclaim Liberty throughout all the land unto all the

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inhabitants thereof.” Lev. 25:10) is inscribed on the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia. The international movement that began in the late 1990s and involved more than 40 nations, campaigning for cancellation of Third World debt, was called Jubilee 2000 and was directly inspired by our Parsha.

The approach of the Torah to economic policy is unusual. Clearly we can make no direct inference from laws given more than three thousand years ago, in an agricultural age and to a society consciously under the sovereignty of God, to the circumstances of the twenty-first century with its global economy and international corporations. Between ancient texts and contemporary application comes the whole careful process of tradition and interpretation of the Oral Law (Torah shebe’al peh).

Nonetheless, there do seem to be some important parameters. Work – making a living, earning your daily bread – has dignity. A Psalm (Tehillim 128:2) states: “When you eat of the labour of your hands, you are happy and it shall be well with you.” Psalms. 128:2

We say this every Saturday night at the start of the working week. Unlike aristocratic cultures such as that of ancient Greece, Judaism was never dismissive of work or the productive economy. It did not favour the creation of a leisured class.

“Torah study without an occupation will in the end fail and lead to sin.” Avot 2:2

Next, unless there are compelling reasons otherwise, one has a right to the fruits of one’s labours. Judaism distrusts large government as an infringement of liberty. That is the core of the prophet Samuel’s warning about monarchy: A king, he says, “will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive groves and give them to his attendants ... He will take a tenth of your flocks, and you yourselves will become his slaves” (I Sam. 8).

Judaism is the religion of a people born in slavery and longing for redemption; and the great assault of slavery against human dignity is that it deprives me of the ownership of the wealth I create. At the heart of the Hebrew Bible is the God who seeks the free worship of free human beings, and one of the most powerful defences of freedom is private property as the basis of economic

independence. The ideal society envisaged by the prophets is one in which each person is able to sit “underneath his own vine and fig tree” (Micah 4:4).

The free economy uses the fuel of competition to sustain the fire of invention. Long before Adam Smith, Judaism had accepted the proposition that the greatest advances are often brought about through quite unspiritual drives. “I saw,” says the author of Ecclesiastes, “that all labour and all achievement spring from man’s envy of his neighbour”. Or as the talmudic sages put it, “Were it not for the evil inclination, no one would build a house, marry a wife, have children, or engage in business.”

The rabbis even favoured the free market in their own sphere of Jewish education. An established teacher, they said, could not object to a rival setting up in competition. The reason they gave was, simply: “Jealousy among scholars increases wisdom” (Bava Batra 21a).

The market economy is the best system we know for alleviating poverty through economic growth. In a single generation - in recent years - it has lifted 100 million Indians and 400 million Chinese from poverty, and the sages saw poverty as an assault on human dignity. Poverty is not a blessed or Divinely ordained condition. It is, the rabbis said, ‘a kind of death’ and ‘worse than fifty plagues’. They said, ‘Nothing is harder to bear than poverty, because he who is crushed by poverty is like one to whom all the troubles of the world cling and upon whom all the curses of Deuteronomy have descended. If all other troubles were placed one side and poverty on the other, poverty would outweigh them all.’

However, the market economy is better at producing wealth than at distributing it equitably. The concentration of wealth in a few hands gives disproportionate power to some at the cost of others. Today in Britain it is not unusual for top CEOs to earn at least 400 times

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as much as their employees. This has not produced economic growth or financial stability but the opposite. As I write these words, one of Margaret Thatcher's advisors, Ferdinand Mount, has just published a critique of the financial deregulation she introduced: *The New Few*. Equally impressive is the recent book by the South Korean economist Ha-Joon Chang, *23 Things they don't tell you about Capitalism*. This is not a critique of market economics, which he believes is still the best system there is. But, in his words, "it needs careful regulation and steering."

That is what the legislation contained in Behar represents. It tells us that an economic system must exist within a moral framework. It need not aim at economic equality, but it must respect human dignity. No one should become permanently imprisoned in the chains of debt. No one should be deprived of a stake in the commonwealth, which in biblical times meant a share in the land. No one should be a slave to his or her employer. Everyone has the right – one day in seven, one year in seven – to respite from the endless pressures of work. None of this means dismantling the market economy, but it may involve periodic redistribution.

At the heart of these laws is a profoundly humane vision of society. "No man is an island." We are responsible for one another and implicated in one another's fate. Those who are blessed by God with more than they need should share some of that surfeit with those who have less than they need. This, in Judaism, is not a matter of charity but of justice – that is what the word *tzedakah* means. We need some of this spirit in advanced economies today if we are not to see human misery and social unrest.

No one said it better than Isaiah in the first chapter of the book that bears his name: Seek justice, encourage the oppressed, Defend the cause of the fatherless, Plead the case of the widow... Is. 1:17

Humanity was not created to serve markets. Markets were made to serve the image of God that is humankind.

[1] Rabbi Sacks wrote this essay in April 2012. The headline he mentions can be found here: <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-17883101>

### **Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin**

#### **Count toward Purity**

"You shall count for yourself seven cycles of sabbatical years, seven years, seven times; the years of the seven cycles of sabbatical years shall be for you forty-nine years." (Leviticus 25:8)

The biblical portions in the book of Leviticus – Tazria, Metzora, Emor and Behar – seem to be almost fixated on the commandment to count,

the commandment of *sefira*. Barely two chapters ago we were commanded:

"And you shall count for yourselves – from the day following the rest day [the first day of the festival of Passover], from the day when you bring the omer of the waving – seven weeks...until the day after the seventh week you shall count fifty days." (Leviticus 23:15–16)

The Bible has commanded us to count each day of the seven weeks between the festivals of Passover and Shavuot, until the fiftieth day. And now in this portion of Behar the Bible is commanding us to count the seven cycles of the sabbatical years (seven times seven or forty-nine years) until the fiftieth year, the jubilee year. Clearly, there is a significant parallel between these two commandments of counting. In a similar way, both men and women (zav and zavah as well as *nidah*) are commanded to count seven days, after which – on the eighth day – they undergo ritual immersion and purity. All of these "countings" must in some way be related.

The count from Passover to Shavuot is – at least from a clear biblical perspective – the count from freedom from slavery into the desert to our entry into Israel and Jerusalem. Yes, on Passover we left Egypt and Egyptian enslavement; however, we only got as far as the desert, with all of the uncertainties of the desert and all of the alien and difficult climatic and agricultural conditions of the desert. It is specifically Shavuot which is biblically defined as the festival of the first fruits, which could be brought to the holy Temple in Jerusalem only once we arrived at the place of our inheritance (Lev. 23:17). The Bible underscores the relationship between Shavuot and Jerusalem when it discusses the special declaration to be made by the Israelite upon bringing the fruits to the Temple altar (Deut. 26:1, 2).

Passover is therefore our freedom from Egypt and slavery; Shavuot is our entry into Israel and Jerusalem, replete with the holy Temple. This idea is even further deepened by the text of the Haggada during the Passover Seder. The Mishna (in *Arvei Pesahim*) teaches that the central part of our retelling of the exodus from Egypt is an explication of the very verses which the individual must read when he brings the first fruits; we are to explicate around the Seder table "from 'Arami oved avi' [An Aramean tried to destroy my forefather] until the end of that portion" (Deut. 26:5–10). However, we do not explicate the entire speech; the Haggada neglects to include the last two verses of the declaration of the one who brings the first fruits. The Haggada quotes:

### **Likutei Divrei Torah**

"An Aramean tried to destroy my forefather; he descended to Egypt...became great, strong and numerous. The Egyptians... afflicted us...we cried out to the Lord our God who heard our voice, saw our affliction, and took us out of Egypt with a strong hand...with signs and with wonders." (Deuteronomy 26:5–8)

However, the final two verses, "He brought us to this place, and He gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey; and now behold I have bought the first fruit of the earth that you have given me, O Lord" (Ibid 26:9, 10), are deleted by the author of the Haggadah.

I heard it said in the name of a great Talmudic giant of the last century that the reason for this deletion is that our entry into the Land of Israel is only destination and not destiny. I would respectfully maintain that the very opposite is the case. Our sojourn in Egypt and even our escape from Egypt were very much directed by God and were part and parcel of Jewish fate. Our entry into Israel, our establishment of our holy Temple in Jerusalem and our ability to influence the world to accept a God of morality and peace through the teachings of the holy Temple are very much dependent upon our own desires and actions. It is the desert which was a temporary destination; Israel and Jerusalem are the Jewish destiny of being a light unto the nations of the world.

That is why the Bible commands, "And you shall sanctify the fiftieth year" within the context of our counting of the sabbatical years leading up to the jubilee. And the very word jubilee is either identified with the word for shofar or ram's horn – the instrument used as our call to repentance – or from the Hebrew 'yovel' which means "he (the nation) shall lead" the entire world back to God. The very jubilee year is biblically defined as a declaration of universal freedom and the return of every individual to his homestead, obvious expressions of redemption.

This march of national freedom from Egyptian slavery to security in our own land from which we must realize our mission to bring peace to the world is expressed by counting, or *sefira*. The Hebrew *s-p-r* also means to tell, to recount, to clarify – which is the real commandment of the Seder night of *sipur yetziat mitzrayim*. The same root *s-p-r* also appears in the biblical description of the throne of the divine at the time of the revelation at Sinai, which is like "the white of the sapphire (sappir) and the purity of the heavens" (Ex. 24:10). From this linguistic perspective, it becomes necessary to understand the commandment to count – *sefira* – as a commandment to become pure and to move closer to the throne of the Almighty. Since there is no redemption without repentance and purification, we now understand why Shavuot is also the time when we receive the Torah

from God – our road map to purity and redemption – and why Shavuot is truly the festival of our destiny. We now also understand why mystical and Hassidic literature refers to the emanations of the divine in this world as sefirot.

### Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand

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

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

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

Rav Simcha Zissel gives the following answer in his sefer on Chumash: When the Torah refers to *ameilus b'Torah* being a *chok*, it is referring to the transformative properties of Torah. Learning Torah does something to a person. Torah learned properly changes the person. He becomes a different person. There is no other academic discipline that has this property. If a person is "amel in Physics" or "amel in Economics," it does not change the nature of the person. Even if someone is an "amel in Philosophy," it still does not affect his nature. To wit, there were great philosophers, who, on a personal level, left much to be desired.

When Chazal say that "you should be *ameilim b'Torah*" here, they are referring to this mystical power of Torah to change people. The pasuk is referring to that "chok." If that is the case, then merely quickly "learning up" a blatt Gemara or merely being *ma'aver sedra* and reading the Targum without knowing what you are saying is a fulfillment of the Biblical Mitzvah of learning Torah – I am not denying

that – but the power of Torah to transform the person requires a different level of learning. That is *amelus b'Torah*. That is *shvitzing* over a Daf of Gemara. That is sweating hard to understand a *Tosfos*.

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

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

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

#### **The Message of Shmitta For Contemporary Society**

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

It seems from this pasuk that the Tochacha occurs because the Jews did not observe Shmitta (the Sabbatical year). Since the land was not allowed to lie fallow for the entire year as intended, the Jews will be exiled from their country and the land will finally lie fallow for many years, as a compensation.

#### **Likutei Divrei Torah**

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

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

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

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

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

The trouble is that we get sidetracked with all the intervening topics in Parshas Behar and we lose the main flow. The way it is supposed to really read is the mitzvah of Shmitta and then right after that "you should be *amelim in Torah*" – because that is what you are

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

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

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

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

#### **Dvar Torah** **Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis**

There is a most intriguing commentary of Rashi at the commencement of Parshat Bechukotai. The parsha starts, "Im bechukotai teleichu..." – "If you walk in my statutes..." and what follows is a list of promises that Hashem gives to us if we obey his commandments. But Rashi doesn't understand "bechukotai teleichu" to mean, 'to observe the mitzvot', but rather, "shetihyu amalim batorah," – that we should engage in the toil of Torah study.' So from where does Rashi know this? Let me ask two further questions.

The passuk says, "bechukotai." The chukot are the laws or statutes of the Torah but we know from elsewhere that there are also eduyot which are testimonies and mishpatim which are the civil laws. So why here are the chukot chosen to represent all the laws?

In addition, we can question the verb used: "im bechukotai teleichu" means "if you walk in my precepts." Walking? Surely the Torah should have said 'tilmedu', if' you study' my precepts?

The term 'chok', meaning a Torah law, 'comes from the word 'chakikah' which means 'to be engraved'. If I take a pen and I write on a piece of paper, the ink will be on the paper but not within it. However if I engrave words within a slab of stone, then the wording becomes an integral part of the substance. 'Chok' therefore suggests that when we study the Torah, our Torah knowledge becomes an integral part of our personalities.

Through his peirush here, Rashi wants us to know that by studying Torah we engage in life shaping exercises. Beyond that, we can interpret "Im bechukotai teleichu" as "If you walk within the study experience," meaning that further to our study, wherever we go, we should allow our learning to influence and to inspire us. Isn't that exactly what we say in the first paragraph of the shema when we refer to the study of Torah: "uvelechtechu baderech" – "and when you walk on the way"? Let us take these words wherever we go while we are on the paths of our journeys through life.

We therefore see how significant Torah study can be for us. But it all depends on one word. It's the opening word of our parsha: Im. If. Im bechukotai teleichu, if you will study Torah, it's available to one and all.

So therefore I throw out this challenge to you: Why not go for it? Why not engage with Torah? And in anticipation of the forthcoming festival of Shavuot, on which we will have a glorious festival of Torah study, please avail of the opportunities in your community. And I promise you, it will shape your lives for the better, and wherever you go, it will accompany you, to give you lives of meaning and happiness always.

#### **Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah**

##### **Preventing the Fall – The Torah's Vision for Preemptive Support- Yael Rudel-Frommer**

One of the central themes of Parshat Behar is the mitzvah of shemittah (the Sabbatical Year) followed immediately by the mitzvah of the yovel (the Jubilee). Both mitzvot require the individual to act in ways that are completely contrary to his own personal interests—whether by ceasing work on the land and leaving its produce for all to take, whether by releasing slaves, or by returning land to its original owners—all for the sake of creating a balanced socio-economic system.

This uniquely precise and distinctive social system is not built on the familiar paradigm of the wealthy caring for the poor through

#### **Likutei Divrei Torah**

charity. That approach, while worthy and commendable, typically preserves the giver-taker divide, maintaining the socio-economic gap and reinforcing a psychological disparity between one who lives with a sense of lack and one who lives with a sense of abundance.

The commandments of shemittah and yovel bring a new dimension, not only when compared to societal ideas external to Judaism, but also relative to other mitzvot of the Torah focused on kindness. Here, the goal is not merely to care for the downtrodden once they've hit rock bottom, but to prevent the very formation of unbridgeable class divides.

This unique demand is also reflected in the Torah's direct command to the individual, when it comes to interpersonal relationships: "If your brother becomes poor and his means falter beside you, then you shall support him..." (Vayikra 25:35).

What does it mean to "support him"? Rashi explains: "Do not let him fall and collapse, making it difficult to raise him up again, but strengthen him from the moment his hand begins to falter. To what is this comparable? To a load on a donkey—while the load is still on the donkey, one person can steady it; but once it falls to the ground, not even five can lift it."

In other words—don't wait for an acute crisis that is hard to recover from. Help beforehand, at the first sign of decline, and prevent the deterioration.

Yoram Teharlev, in his song "Heyeh li chaver, heyeh li ach" ("Be my friend, be my brother"), wrote lyrics that portray brotherhood and friendship revealed in times of crisis. At first glance, the song's words seem to echo the verse we cited, but upon deeper reflection, differences emerge that illuminate the elevated standard the Torah sets before us:

"Be my friend, be my brother,  
Reach out your hand when I call,  
Be my friend, be my brother,  
Reach out your hand in times of trouble,  
I am your brother, do not forget—  
Be my friend, be my brother."

In the song, the person in need explicitly asks the other to be a friend and brother, and the gesture of friendship is expressed by reaching out a hand—after being asked—in times of trouble. In our portion, the Torah expects us to support our brother even before he sinks deeply into trouble, and even before he asks. The person in need should not have to say, "Be my friend, be my brother"; from the outset, the giver's perspective must be that every fellow Jew, every person, is his "brother," and he extends his hand even before the fall, perhaps

even before the person himself realizes he is in need.

Similarly, Ehud Banai, in his song "Al Tifchad" ("Don't Be Afraid"), also addresses brotherhood and support for others, but highlights an aspect which is, perhaps, more aligned with the instructions arising from the verses in our portion:

"If the moment of fear returns,  
I will come to reach out my hand.  
I will always be close to you,  
To hold you in case you tremble."

Here, the person in need does not need to ask. At the very moment he begins to feel fear, his friend comes to extend a hand. The promise of immediate support is not lip service—the friend vows that he will "always be close," and thus truly be able to help in the moment of need. The promised help comes "in case you tremble"—the trembling expresses fear, even before the worst necessarily happens. Hence, the opening lines now make perfect sense:

"Don't be afraid,  
You are not alone."

Such words truly guarantee that the person will feel enveloped and cared for, and not feel alone.

The principles behind the command to "support" your brother before he falls, and to "reset" major economic gaps before they polarize society beyond repair, require us to go a few steps beyond.

Not just to behave decently, avoiding harm to others—but to be actively engaged in meaningful help that allows others to stand as equals. Not merely to respond to reality once it reaches a breaking point—but to broaden our perspective, open our eyes early, and succeed in preventing suffering altogether.

In the time leading up to the war, many felt that we were standing on the brink of civil war—that we had reached an extreme polarization which was impossible to bridge. The war against an external enemy revealed profound displays of brotherhood not seen in a long time, between people whose opinions, political views, financial situations, and entire lifestyles were vastly different.

The implementation of the principles behind shemittah and yovel could serve as a foundation for preventing severe social gaps and acute societal divides—before we reach a tipping point, when the chasm has grown too deep and wide to be bridged.

May we merit to actively create brotherhood, and from it fulfill the words of the verse: "You shall sanctify the fiftieth year and proclaim

liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants," and may our great prayer come to pass—the continuation of that verse: "...Each of you shall return to his property, and each of you shall return to his family." (Vayikra 25:10)

### Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

#### Rabbi Mordechai Willig Unbounded Sanctity

I. I will place My sanctuary among you... I will walk among you (Vayikra 26:11,12) The Seforno explains this to mean: My presence will dwell among you wherever you are, as it was destined before the [sin of the golden] calf, as He said (Shemos 20:21), "Wherever I mention My name I will come to you and bless you". The Seforno renders "wherever I mention My Name" to refer to the houses of Hashem, such as a beis hamedrash where Torah is learned (see Oz Vehadar edition footnote 39). Hashem is saying as follows: I will not be limited to one place only, as it was in the Mishkan and in the Mikdash (as it says in Shemos 25:8, "They shall make a sanctuary for Me so that I may dwell among them"), rather, I will walk among you and My glory will be seen wherever you are. My holy upper presence (Tehillim 46:5) is wherever the righteous of the generation will be.

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

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

Rav Chaim Ya'akov Goldvicht (Asufas Ma'arachos, Shavuot p.154) refers to the very beginning of Parshas Bechukosai, which states the prerequisite for the ensuing berachos: "If you will follow My decrees" (26:3). Rashi explains this to mean, "that you will toil in the [study of] Torah". Only by immersion in Torah

### Likutei Divrei Torah

study can one earn the beracha of the Divine Presence dwelling within him. Moreover, as Tosafos (Bava Basra 21a) cites from the Sifri, the very purpose of going up to Yerushalayim is to learn to fear Hashem always (Devarim 14:23). When one would see the great sanctity and the kohanim doing the avoda, he would serve Hashem better and learn Torah. While staying in Yerushalayim to consume his ma'aser sheni, he would see everyone serving Hashem and he, too, would focus on fear of Hashem and learn Torah.

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

III. Next Friday is Yom Yerushalayim, 28 Iyar. I was privileged to be a student of Rav Goldvicht in Kerem B'Yavne when Yerushalayim was reunited on that day in 1967. One week later, on Shavuot, the Old City and the Kosel Hama'ravi were opened to the public. The talmidim of Kerem B'Yavne who were not in the Army held a mishmar in Heichal Shlomo and marched, and danced, to the Kosel for Musaf. The unforgettable experience culminated with the partially fulfilled prayer, "bring us to Tziyon Your city with joy and to Yerushalayim with eternal happiness." Only "Your Beis Hamikdash" was missing. The euphoria of the event, and the miraculous turnaround from open threats of annihilation to a stunning military victory in six days, preoccupied all of us. We were taken to Kever Rachel and Me'aras Hamachpela, sites we had never expected to see in our lifetime just weeks earlier. A lavish se'udas hoda'ah was held in the Yeshiva.

It was then that Rav Goldvicht cautioned us to have a proper perspective. Surely there is an obligation to thank Hashem for the miracles, and to be inspired by our newfound closeness to the site of the Beis Hamikdash. However, as our daily tefilla states, and as the Seforno and the Malbim explain, studying Torah is an even higher level. It is an internal and eternal sanctity, our share in Hashem's Torah.

The Rosh Yeshiva quoted the Gemara (Makkos 10a): one day in Your courtyards is better than a thousand (Tehillim 84:11). Hashem said [to David Hamelech]: one day that you learn Torah before me is better than a thousand offerings that your son Shlomo will sacrifice before Me on the mizbeach. This demonstrates that Torah learning is a higher value than the Avoda in the Beis Hamikdash.

The heady days of June 1967 are but a memory, however glorious and unforgettable. The city and land of Hashem, reunited and liberated, suffer from terror and divisiveness which did not exist back then. The glory is not eternal.

This week's parsha begins with toiling in Torah, and its berachos culminate in the personal sanctity of Torah, which is not bounded by time or place. This week's perek in Pirkei Avos adds the prayer for our share in Torah to the prayer for the rebuilding of the Beis Hamikdash. As we celebrate Yom Yerushalayim and Shavuos, may we merit the speedy fulfillment of both these prayers.

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

##### **Savor the Flavor**

If you follow My statutes and observe My commandments and perform them, (Vayikra 26:3)

If you follow My statutes: I might think that this refers to the fulfillment of the commandments. However, when Scripture says, "and observe My commandments," the fulfillment of the commandments is [already] stated. So, what is the meaning of "If you follow My statutes"? It means that you must toil in the study of Torah. — Rashi

The way to go and the way to grow in life is to strive and toil in Torah. Rashi spells it out clearly and we can see with our own eyes how learning Torah catalyzes personal and communal growth. The operative term here is "Amelim B'Torah" to be "striving in Torah". Unfortunately, for some people, sometimes, this expression triggers feelings of intensity and pressure which is associated with unpleasantness. Yet, Shlomo HaMelech, the wisest of all men has already told us, "All its ways are ways of pleasantness...". Furthermore, any even slightly sensitive educator will tell us that a mind that is under pressure cannot process information. A person, a child or an adult, learns best when they are relaxed. So, how do we understand, how do we envision, and how do we practice this ideal of "Amelim B'Torah".

The Gur Aryeh explains Rashi's understanding of the verse, "The word for "follow" here, עכלת, literally means "walk," which is a strenuous activity." Fascinating to note that the word that indicates "Amelos" — "Toiling" is "Telechu" — walking/going. It does not say sprinting or flying. It speaks of walking. Walking is strenuous but not intense. It is continuous but not exhausting. It can be effortful but at the same time extremely pleasant.

Avraham Avinu was told, "Lech Lecha" — to go. There was no specified destination in that mandate. Why not? It's not about just getting from point A to point B and you have arrived. It's about going out of your comfort zone step by step and honoring the process of growth, like a train that is always arriving but never arrives. It's a journey to be enjoyed. So, it is with learning Torah. There is no limit, no stopping point, where one can say, "I have arrived. It's a process of life learning. The means is as sweet as the end, which is ever illusive.

Reb Nota Schiller pithily said that there needs to be a healthy tension between the "is and the ought". It's about direction not perfection. A violin that has loose and limp strings cannot be used to make beautiful music. They need to be taut (taught) for the music of life to be expressed.

That very much describes this ideal of walking/going continuously. Keeping that healthy tension alive while enjoying the way.

A great person said that the main Amelos B'Torah is humbling one's self before the Torah. The Torah does not necessarily settle in the mind of the one with a high IQ. It may be just the opposite. I have seen otherwise brilliant people flop and fail and grow frustrated in Torah study despite their high academic achievements in other areas.

The Talmud tells us that if one says, "Yagati Matzati" — "I struggled and I found" (Torah wisdom) we believe him. If he says that he didn't struggle and found, this is not a credible story. If he says that he struggled and didn't find it's also not believable but if he says that he didn't struggle and he did not find, about that we can believe him.

First a person must try with his own maximum effort and then the Torah comes as a gift. If it came about only through effort and force then we would be led to wrongly think "I did it". In the end we realize that it is a gift of knowledge from HASHEM for our efforts. Just waiting for a gift without investing time and energy engenders laziness, and nothing special happens. The main thing is to nullify ourselves to HASHEM and His Torah, and that's truly sweet and the ultimate in pleasantness.

#### **Likutei Divrei Torah**

I like to remind Yeshiva students, especially ones that are experiencing the extra pressure and anxiety associated with competitiveness in learning, that they are eating ice cream all day. Enjoy it! Don't try to eat your ice cream faster and more voluminously than anyone else. Don't look around and feel inadequate because you are eating a pint of chocolate chip and someone else is finishing a gallon of mint pistachio or fudge swirl. Relish that milk and honey one delicious spoonful at a time. That is Amelos B'Torah. Savor the flavor!

#### **Foundation of Faith: based on the Thought and Writings of Rabbi Norman Lam\***

The world was created with ten utterances. What does this teach us? Certainly, it could have been created with a single utterance. However, this is in order to make the wicked accountable for destroying a world that was created with ten utterances, and to reward the righteous for sustaining a world that was created with ten utterances.

Ten - This positive value of confrontation has been expressed in a beautiful symbolic manner by a great sage of modern times. Our rabbis of the Talmud categorized the entire period from Creation to Sinai, the revelation of the Torah, as tohu, chaos. What they meant was that the world as created by God was only physically complete but had not actualized its moral potential. It came of age morally only with the giving of Torah at Sinai. Now, what is the catalyst that helped in this transformation? What is it that helped the world overcome its amoral character and rise to the level of Sinai? The great Gerer Rebbe identifies this catalyst as the Ten Plagues of which we read today. In epigrammatic fashion, he tells us that the transition from asarah ma'amarot to aseret hadibrot was effected by eser makkot. The world was created through Ten "Words" of God, such as "Let there be light," etc. Creation is therefore symbolized by the Ten Words, and its moral maturity by the Ten Commandments. But it was the Ten Plagues that made this possible. The confrontation of Moses with Egypt succeeded in uprooting the corruption of Egypt, exposing the vacuousness of its nefarious paganism, and therefore allowing Israel to emerge from within it and receive the Torah. Without the Ten Plagues, the Ten Words would never have become the Ten Commandments.

Ten Words - Furthermore, we must be not only discriminating in our words, but sparse as well. Our words must be few and scarce. In all of Judaism, the principle of Kedushah is protected from the danger of over-familiarity. When people have too much free access to an object or a place, they gradually lose respect and awe for it. That is why the reader of the Torah will use a yad, a silver pointer. That is not used for decorative purposes. It is because

of the Halakhah that kitvei kodesh metamin et hayadayim – that we are forbidden to touch the inner part of the Torah scroll. The reason for this is a profound insight of the Torah into human nature: if we are permitted to touch it freely and often, we will lose our reverence for it. The less we are permitted to contact it, the greater our respect for it. Similarly, the Holy of Holies in the Temple in Jerusalem was preserved in its sanctity by our tradition when it forbade any person other than the high priest to enter its sacred precincts; and even he might not do so except for one time during the year – on the Day of Atonement.

And so it is with words. The more we use, the less they mean. When our rabbis investigated the first portion of Genesis, they discovered that the world was created by asarah ma'amarot, ten "words." Only ten words to create an entire universe! And yet our rabbis were not satisfied. And so they asked, "Could not the world have been created with only one word?" Why waste nine precious words? Indeed, for with words, quantity is in inverse relationship to quality. If there are so many words that you cannot count them, then no individual word counts for very much.

*Excerpted from Foundation of Faith: A Tapestry of Insights and Illumination on Pirkei Avot based on the Thought and Writings of Rabbi Norman Lamm, The Gibber Edition, edited by Rabbi Mark Dratch, co-published with Ktav Publishing*



BS"D

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**Rabbi Yissocher Frand <ryfrand@torah.org>**  
**Two Explanations of the "Giborei Koach" Title Given to Shmita Observers**  
**Parshas Behar**

Two Explanations of the "Giborei Koach" Title Given to Shmita Observers  
These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: #1336 – The Tochacha of Parshas Bechukosai – Should It Be Avoided? Good Shabbos!

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

There is a famous Medrash that we have spoken about numerous times over the years. The Medrash in Vayikra Rabba quotes the pasuk in Tehillim: "Giborei koach oseh devoro" (Tehillim 103:20) referring to people of mighty strength, people of character. Who are the people this pasuk is mentioning? The Medrash says that normally a mitzvah takes a single day or a single week or a single month to accomplish. However, people sitting and watching their fields lying fallow while still paying taxes, etc. is extraordinary because it continues for an entire year. The Medrash says there are no greater "giborei koach" than these people.

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

There is a famous question that many people ask on this Medrash: What is the big deal about this special attribute of "giborei koach" associated with Shmita observance? After all, the Torah assures us that in the year prior to Shmita (the sixth year of the seven-year Sabbatical cycle), the crop will

produce triple what it produces in a normal year (years one through five of the Sabbatical cycle).

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

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

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

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

Even though one may have the \$300,000 in the bank, it is very difficult for him to sit back and let all this happen. This is the attribute of giborei koach. The other answer to this question is another great principle of human nature: how easily we forget. True, in the sixth year I earned triple what I earn in a normal year, but that was in the past. In the seventh year, I did not earn anything. People don't remember that last year they took in triple their normal income. It is the old principle of "What have you done for me lately?" We forget the good.

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

The fellow goes into the dentist's office on Motzai Shabbos. The dentist treats him and relieves the pain. The patient says to the dentist "How much do I owe you?" The dentist answers "You owe me half of what you wanted to give me before I fixed your tooth." This means that when the patient was in pain, he was willing to give the dentist an arm and a leg. "Whatever it is, I can't live like this." But after the fact, we forget that. That's the way we are. So yes, I earned the money the previous year, but that was yesterday. That was last year. Therefore, it is still very difficult for me to sit back and take with equanimity the fact that my land is now hefker.

2. The Juxtaposition of Shmita With "And When Your Brother Becomes Poor":

Immediately following the parsha of Shmita, the Torah goes into a whole downward spiral of "When your brother becomes poor and needs to sell his inheritance..." (Vayikra 25:25-28). The Torah talks about a poor person who falls on hard times. The Gemara (Eruchin 30) comments on the juxtaposition of the mitzvah of Shmitah and this downward spiral of the poor person: Come and see the severity of the prohibition of doing business with seventh-year produce: A person does business with fruits of the Shmita year and what happens to him? He falls on hard times. He needs to sell his movable objects (furniture, car, etc.) because he does not have enough money. This means that the Ribono shel Olam is sending him a message: You tried to make money by illegally selling Shmita fruit. Now look what's happening to you. If he doesn't get the message, he will not only need to sell his moveable objects, he will even need to sell his real estate. Ultimately, he will be so

poor that he will even need to sell his daughter into slavery. If he still doesn't "get it," eventually he will even need to sell himself as a slave.

This, the Gemara explains, is the juxtaposition of the parsha of Shmita and the person who falls on hard times. Rabbeinu Yakov Yosef, the one and only "Chief Rabbi of New York City" (brought over from Vilna at the end of the 1800s to serve in that position) offered another insight into this juxtaposition: If a poor person comes to you and says "Listen, I am poor. I can't make my mortgage payment. You need to help me out." Our reaction might be "Don't worry. Have bitachon (trust in G-d). The Ribono shel Olam will take care of you." However, that is not a proper reaction.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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**Tidbits** • Parshas Behar - Bechukosai 5785

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Thu, May 22, 7:01 PM (5 hours ago)

Parshas Behar - Bechukosai • May 24th • 26 Iyar 5785

This week is Shabbos Mevorchim Chodesh Sivan. Rosh Chodesh is on Wednesday, May 28th. The molad is Tuesday morning at 9:14am and 3 chalakim.

Av Harachamim is recited in most communities despite Shabbos Mevorchim. (This is due to the significance of the sefirah mourning period.) The first opportunity for Kiddush Levana is Motzaei Shabbos, May 31st. The final opportunity is at 9:15pm on Wednesday night, June 10th.

In most congregations the aliyah of shelishi in Parshas Bechukosai that includes the Tochachah is taken by the baal koreh or the gabbai (in many

shuls they do so without being called up). The pesukim of the Tochachah are read in a slightly quicker and lower tone (while ensuring that the words are audible).

The Shelah writes that Erev Rosh Chodesh Sivan (next Tuesday, May 27th), is an auspicious time to daven for the spiritual well-being of one's children. Therefore, many recite Tefillas HaShelah on this day. The Shelah writes that one should give tzedakah to a worthy person along with this tefillah.

Sefirah: On Friday night we count the 41st day of the Omer. Pirkei Avos: Perek 5

Daf Yomi - Shabbos: Bavli: Shevuos 23 • Yerushalmi: Eruvin 56. Siyum on Tuesday, May 29th; mazal tov! • Mishnah Yomis: Avos 2:4-5 • Orayasa (coming week): Taanis 18a-20a • Kitzur Shulchan Aruch: 91:14-92:2  
The Sheloshes Y'mei Hagbalah are Friday, Shabbos and Sunday. May 30th - June 9th-11th. Shavuos begins on Sunday evening, June 1st.

Summaries: BEHAR: The laws of Shemittah and Yovel • Selling and redeeming ancestral properties and homes • Helping impoverished Jews • The Jew who is sold as a slave • We are slaves of Hashem who took us out of Mitzrayim • See Taryag Section for a complete review BECHUKOSAI: Reward for following the Torah • The Tochachah, admonition against abandoning the Torah and the details of the punishment for doing so • The laws of Arachin and Hekdesh • See Taryag Weekly for the various mitzvos • Chazak Chazak V'nis'chazeik!

Haftarah: The Parasha discusses the laws of redeeming land in Eretz Yisrael from a purchaser. This chapter in Yirmiyah (32:6-27) takes place during the siege of Yerushalayim by Nevuchadnetzar. Despite Klal Yisrael being under immediate threat of exile, Hashem commands Yirmiyah to redeem his uncle's field. Yirmiyah's act displayed for all to see that despite the impending exile the land would ultimately be redeemed and the nation would return there.

Taryag Weekly:

Parshas Behar • 57 Pesukim • 7 Obligations • 17 Prohibitions 1-4) Do not work the field or trees or harvest aftergrowth or fruits during the Shemittah year. 5) Sanhedrin should count the years of Shemittah and Yovel. 6) Blow Shofar on Yom Kippur of the Yovel year. 7) Beis Din shall sanctify the Yovel year. 8-10) Do not work the field or trees during Yovel, or harvest aftergrowth or fruits. 11) Utilize halachic modes of acquisition. 12) Do not overcharge or defraud. 13) Do not harass or embarrass another. 14) Do not sell land in Eretz Yisrael in perpetuity. 15) Return all lands to their original owners at Yovel. 16) Right of redemption for one year on sold property in a walled city. 17) Do not alter the usage of properties of the Levi'im. 18) Do not lend with interest. 19-21) Do not employ or sell a Jewish slave in a degrading manner, but rather as a regular employee. 22) Retain your gentile slave. 23) Prevent a Jewish slave from mistreatment by a gentile overlord. 24) Do not prostrate on a stone floor. Parshas Bechukosai • 78 Pesukim • 7 Obligations • 5 Prohibitions 1) Fulfill monetary vows of Arachin. 2) Do not transfer kedushah between animals (Temurah). 3) Accord kedushah to a Temurah. 4) Redeem unfit Korbanos. 5) Redeem consecrated property with the Kohen's appraisal and add one fifth of the value. 6) Redeem consecrated fields at the prescribed amounts. 7) Do not re-designate a Korban. 8-10) Give Cherem consecrated items to the Kohen; do not sell or redeem them. 11) Separate Maaser Behaimah. 12) Do not redeem or sell Maaser Behaimah.

For the Shabbos Table: "לֹא תִנְשַׁק אֶת־מִנְחָת־אֶת־בָּשָׂר־אֶת־בָּשָׂר" Do not give him your money for interest (Vayikra 25:37) Students of the Tchebiner Rav once lent money to a local merchant with interest, using a heter iska (a halachic leniency that structures a typical loan as a business partnership).

Unfortunately, the merchant fell on hard times and it became clear that the students' loan would not be repaid. The distraught students consulted the Tchebiner Rav about the matter. The Tchebiner Rav related to them that his father, the Kochav MiYaakov, noted that the language of our pasuk "Do not give your money for interest" seems incorrect. Should it not read "Do not lend your money for interest"? The Kochav MiYaakov explained that when one loans money with interest, there is a real chance that his funds will be lost; those monies will thus be 'given' and lost to the borrower. In contrast, the pasuk in Mishlei (19:16) says "He who is generous to the poor makes a

loan to Hashem; He will repay him his due". One who lends money to the poor without interest is assured that he will be repaid his due by Hashem Almighty - surely the safest investment possible.

from: sinensky3@gmail.com date: May 22, 2025, 4:59 PM  
www.yu.edu/drlamm

**Rabbi Norman Lamm** Be'hukotai

The Jewish Center May 27, 1967

**"In This Hour Of Crisis"**

This is an hour of crisis, not only for Israel as a State but for Israel as a people. [This sermon was delivered just days before the outbreak of the Six Day War.] Our destiny, and the destiny of our children and children's children after us, is being forged by the soldiers of Israel on lonely outposts in the Gaza strip and on the heights overlooking the Gulf of Aqaba.<sup>2</sup> No Jew can afford to look upon the tense situation as an outsider. As Mordecai the Jew said to Queen Esther, highly placed in non-Jewish society and politics, al tedami be'nafshekh le'himalet beit avikh – do not imagine that you will find safety whilst danger befalls the rest of the House of Israel.

The Arab guns aimed at the heart of the State are aimed at our hearts. The stranglehold on the Gulf of Aqaba, the lifeline of the medinah, is a stranglehold on our throats. And the Russian contempt for the State of Israel bespeaks the old, traditional Russian contempt for all of us as Jews. How ought we react in this grave hour? How have Jews always and should Jews now react?

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

The doron, or gift, that Jacob presented to his brother was a form of legitimate appeasement of a bloodthirsty aggressor, in an attempt to turn his hatred into good will. Indeed, it happened to work with Jacob. But it cannot work for Israel today. First, you cannot placate an enemy who is implacable. Those of us who saw King Faisal on television two days ago heard him declare his avowed intention of exterminating Israel, and President Nasser said the same thing yesterday. Nothing less than that would satisfy our enemies. Moreover, Israel has nothing left to give. It has given all but the bare skeletal structure necessary for the survival of a modern country. Hence, our doron must be the gift that we American Jews are going to give to the Jews and the government of the State of Israel; in other words, our accelerated participation in that great and historic venture known as the UJA. No Jew who fails to give, and to significantly increase his pledge over the past, has a moral right to be proud that he is a Jew. This year Israel faces unusual economic difficulty; the present fall-off in tourism, together with the stupendous military expenditures that it must undertake, make the situation and the need grave indeed. Those who will therefore give this year far in excess of what they gave in the past, and far in excess of what they are able to give, will be performing an invaluable service. Those who do not do so are, with all their talk, valueless for Israel. Their talk, their worry, their advice, their concern, their pride, their keeping their ears glued to the radio – all this is meaningless! The Jewish Center Family will have an opportunity on June 7th [the Salute to Israel Parade] to demonstrate the extent of its commitment. I should like to see an enthusiastic response like never before. It behooves us to give our doron before we are solicited, and to prepare a gift that will tell Israel that we have not faltered, and all the world that Israel does not stand alone. The second part of that strategy is milhamah, war. Can we participate in milhamah if it should be necessary?

Yes we can, and yes it is necessary. There are many ways to fight a war, many fronts, and many weapons. Our contribution, though not military, must not be under-estimated. For one thing, we must undertake an indefatigable political campaign. As members of a subculture in this great democracy, it is entirely proper that we make our opinion felt where such opinions carry

weight. We must undertake to inform, by letter and telegram, our President that we support his support of Israel, and to tell him as well as our Senators and Representatives that it was at the urging of an American Secretary of State that Israel gave up much of its precious victory in Sinai, and that the United States has treaty obligations to Israel. This is one campaign in which we can participate immediately after the Sabbath is over.

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

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

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

However, when duty and destiny call upon us to work so that others might bear arms on behalf of Israel, or even, if need be, that we do so ourselves, we shall not be found hesitating or faltering! If we were a nation like unto other nations, this fight would still be noble, but natural. Our existence is at stake, and we shall not submit to the murderous ambitions of that Hitler of the Nile, to those hysterical pygmies of Damascus, or to that venal and obnoxious monarch of the desert kingdom of slave traders.<sup>5</sup>

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

Israel is a penance paid by Russia for Babi Yar, by England for the Struma,<sup>6</sup> by the United States for its refusal to hear the cry of the refugees in time, by

the Catholic countries for the silence of the Deputy Pope, by each and every country for its own public and private crimes against the people of the Lord. When we shall, therefore, act in defense of Israel, we will be fighting not only for Israel's and our existence, but in effect for the honor of Russia and England and America and France and all of mankind, whether they know it or not, realize or not, care or not, appreciate it or not, even whether they want it or not. For we shall ever remain, as Yehudah Halevi has called us, the heart of the nations and their conscience.

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

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

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

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

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

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

An answer is provided to us by **Rabbi Mordecai Rogov of Chicago, in his work "Ateret Mordecai."** [1965 <https://www.hebrewbooks.org/3259>] He points to the Midrash which states in the name of Rabbi Samuel b. Nachman, that God says: ki anokhi yadati et ha-mahshavot, for I know the thoughts of all men. Applying that to the story of Joseph and his brothers, the Midrash tells us that the brothers were preoccupied with the selling of Joseph, Joseph was busy bemoaning his own bitter fate, Judah was involved in looking for a wife – but ve'ha-Kadosh barukh Hu hayah asuk be'oro shel Mashiah, all this while, God was preoccupied with the light of the Messiah! Each of the actors in the great drama thought that he knew the whole story. The brothers saw this as an act of vengeance, Joseph as a bitter tragedy that had reached its nadir, Judah was altogether distracted by an extraneous matter. None of them really saw the entire episode in its true, ultimate perspective. None of them realized that God was not "busy" moving affairs as he individually saw it, but that the Almighty was simply making preparations for the ultimate development of Jewish history, leading to the final redemption. The Joseph story, even more than others, reveals how human intention and Divine design can sometimes be utterly different and yet mesh with each other, and how the Divine plan often uses humans who do not even appreciate the role that they play.

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

So it is with the current episode. Today the Arabs are thinking of a quick victory. Russia sees the entire incident as a chance to dislodge the United States from Vietnam. Israel views it as one great crisis that must be overcome. The United States considers it as an added complication forcing it to juggle both Near-Eastern and Far-Eastern commitments. The United

Nations regards it as a need to make up for U Thant's blunder, the biggest in the history of diplomacy. [Then-Secretary General of the United Nations U Thant was widely criticized for acceding to Egypt's May 1967 demand that UN peacekeeping troops evacuate Egypt, opening the door to war.] But our hope and our confidence is that God will take "time out" from these individual considerations of the protagonists of the drama and ultimately reveal to us His true preoccupation: ve'ha-Kadosh barukh Hu hayah asuk be'oro shel Mashiah, that Almighty God is weaving all these political and military strands into the garment of light that the Messiah will wear, into the intricate designs by which there will come to Israel and all the world the geulah shelema, the complete redemption.

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

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from: The Rabbi Sacks Legacy <[info@rabbisacks.org](mailto:info@rabbisacks.org)>

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### **The Limits of the Free Market (Behar, Bechukotai)**

#### **Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks ZTL**

As I was writing this essay, a newspaper headline caught my eye. It read: "The UK's richest people have defied the double-dip recession to become even richer over the past year."<sup>[1]</sup>

This is in spite of the fact that most people have become poorer, or at least seen their real income stay static, since the financial crisis of 2008. As the saying goes, "There's nothing surer: the rich get rich and the poor get poorer." It is to this phenomenon that the social legislation of Parshat Behar is addressed.

Leviticus 25 sets out a number of laws whose aim is to correct the tendency toward radical and ever-increasing inequality that result from the unfettered play of free market economics. So we have the Sabbatical year (Shemittah) in which debts were released, Hebrew slaves were set free, the land lay fallow and its produce, unharvested, belonged to everyone. There was the Jubilee year (Yovel) in which, with some exceptions, ancestral land returned to its original owners. There was the command to help the needy ("If any of your fellow Israelites become poor and are unable to support themselves among you, help them as you would a foreigner and stranger, so they can continue to live among you" Lev. 25:35.) And there was the obligation to treat slaves not slavishly but as "hired workers or temporary residents." (Lev. 25:40)

As Heinrich Heine pointed out:

"Moses did not want to abolish ownership of property; he wished, on the contrary, that everyone should possess something, so that no man might, because of poverty, be a slave with a slavish mind. Liberty was forever the ultimate thought of this great emancipator, and it still breathes and flames in all his laws which concern pauperism."

Israel Tabak, Judaic Lore in Heine, Johns Hopkins University Press reprints, 1979, 32.

Despite the sheer antiquity of these laws, time and again they have inspired those wrestling with issues of liberty, equity and justice. The verse about the Jubilee Year, ("Proclaim Liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof." Lev. 25:10) is inscribed on the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia. The international movement that began in the late 1990s and involved more than 40 nations, campaigning for cancellation of Third World debt, was called Jubilee 2000 and was directly inspired by our Parsha. The approach of the Torah to economic policy is unusual. Clearly we can make no direct inference from laws given more than three thousand years ago, in an agricultural age and to a society consciously under the sovereignty of God, to the circumstances of the twenty-first century with its global economy and international corporations. Between ancient texts and contemporary application comes the whole careful process of tradition and interpretation of the Oral Law (Torah shebe'al peh).

Nonetheless, there do seem to be some important parameters. Work – making a living, earning your daily bread – has dignity. A Psalm (Tehillim 128:2) states:

“When you eat of the labour of your hands, you are happy and it shall be well with you.”

Psalms. 128:2

We say this every Saturday night at the start of the working week. Unlike aristocratic cultures such as that of ancient Greece, Judaism was never dismissive of work or the productive economy. It did not favour the creation of a leisured class.

“Torah study without an occupation will in the end fail and lead to sin.”

Avot 2:2

Next, unless there are compelling reasons otherwise, one has a right to the fruits of one’s labours. Judaism distrusts large government as an infringement of liberty. That is the core of the prophet Samuel’s warning about monarchy: A king, he says, “will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive groves and give them to his attendants ... He will take a tenth of your flocks, and you yourselves will become his slaves” (I Sam. 8). Judaism is the religion of a people born in slavery and longing for redemption; and the great assault of slavery against human dignity is that it deprives me of the ownership of the wealth I create. At the heart of the Hebrew Bible is the God who seeks the free worship of free human beings, and one of the most powerful defences of freedom is private property as the basis of economic independence. The ideal society envisaged by the prophets is one in which each person is able to sit “underneath his own vine and fig tree” (Micah 4:4).

The free economy uses the fuel of competition to sustain the fire of invention. Long before Adam Smith, Judaism had accepted the proposition that the greatest advances are often brought about through quite unspiritual drives. “I saw,” says the author of Ecclesiastes, “that all labour and all achievement spring from man’s envy of his neighbour”. Or as the talmudic sages put it, “Were it not for the evil inclination, no one would build a house, marry a wife, have children, or engage in business.”

The rabbis even favoured the free market in their own sphere of Jewish education. An established teacher, they said, could not object to a rival setting up in competition. The reason they gave was, simply: “Jealousy among scholars increases wisdom” (Bava Batra 21a).

The market economy is the best system we know for alleviating poverty through economic growth. In a single generation - in recent years - it has lifted 100 million Indians and 400 million Chinese from poverty, and the sages saw poverty as an assault on human dignity. Poverty is not a blessed or Divinely ordained condition. It is, the rabbis said, ‘a kind of death’ and ‘worse than fifty plagues’. They said, ‘Nothing is harder to bear than poverty, because he who is crushed by poverty is like one to whom all the troubles of the world cling and upon whom all the curses of Deuteronomy have descended. If all other troubles were placed one side and poverty on the other, poverty would outweigh them all.’

However, the market economy is better at producing wealth than at distributing it equitably. The concentration of wealth in a few hands gives disproportionate power to some at the cost of others. Today in Britain it is not unusual for top CEOs to earn at least 400 times as much as their employees. This has not produced economic growth or financial stability but the opposite. As I write these words, one of Margaret Thatcher’s advisors, Ferdinand Mount, has just published a critique of the financial deregulation she introduced: The New Few. Equally impressive is the recent book by the South Korean economist Ha-Joon Chang, 23 Things they don’t tell you about Capitalism. This is not a critique of market economics, which he believes is still the best system there is. But, in his words, “it needs careful regulation and steering.”

That is what the legislation contained in Behar represents. It tells us that an economic system must exist within a moral framework. It need not aim at economic equality, but it must respect human dignity. No one should become permanently imprisoned in the chains of debt. No one should be deprived of a stake in the commonwealth, which in biblical times meant a share in the

land. No one should be a slave to his or her employer. Everyone has the right – one day in seven, one year in seven – to respite from the endless pressures of work. None of this means dismantling the market economy, but it may involve periodic redistribution.

At the heart of these laws is a profoundly humane vision of society. “No man is an island.” We are responsible for one another and implicated in one another’s fate. Those who are blessed by God with more than they need should share some of that surfeit with those who have less than they need. This, in Judaism, is not a matter of charity but of justice – that is what the word tzedakah means. We need some of this spirit in advanced economies today if we are not to see human misery and social unrest.

No one said it better than Isaiah in the first chapter of the book that bears his name:

Seek justice, encourage the oppressed,  
Defend the cause of the fatherless,  
Plead the case of the widow...

Is. 1:17

Humanity was not created to serve markets. Markets were made to serve the image of God that is humankind.

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Fw from allenklein@gmail.com

from: **Rabbi Efrem Goldberg** <reg@rabbiefremgoldberg.com>

reg@brsonline.org

date: May 21, 2025, 2:32 PM

subject: **What Dave Portnoy Got Wrong, New Behind the Bima, Latest Shiurim, and More.** .

Dave Portnoy is a successful businessman with a large following online. He sold the company he founded, Barstool Sports, for \$500 million, and bought it back a few years later for \$1. Millions follow him on social media and watch his daily pizza reviews around the country, including a review of matza pizza right here in Boca Raton.

Portnoy is Jewish, something he doesn’t hide but also doesn’t regularly reference or promote. He has occasionally displayed his Judaism, such as when Chabad put Tefillin on him or more recently, when he celebrated the defeat of an MMA fighter who had praised Hitler by putting on a yarmulka and waving an Israeli flag in the front row of the match. Soon after October 7, he spoke out in support of Israel and has since then publicly defended Israel’s right to exist and to defend itself.

Yet, nothing has made Portnoy as outspoken about his Jewishness or aggressively stand up for the Jewish people like the antisemitic incident that happened at his Philadelphia bar a couple of weeks ago. Customers who order bottle service there are offered customizable letter boards, which they can ask staff members to arrange with messages of their choice. A student or two from Temple University who visited the bar asked staff members to arrange the letters on his sign into an antisemitic message including an expletive directed at the Jewish people. The incident was a staff breakdown and, more importantly, an expression of hate.

Portnoy took to his social media to communicate his outrage. “I’ve been shaking I’ve been so mad. I’m gonna make it my life mission to ruin these people, like I’m coming for your throat.” However, a few hours later, he posted another video saying he had reconsidered his approach, and instead had decided to send the young men responsible for the hate speech on a tour of Auschwitz to learn about the impact of hate.

He explained: “My initial reaction was like I’m going to burn these people to the ground, their families, everything, and it’s like you know what? Maybe that’s not the best course of action. Maybe I can use this as a teaching moment, and like before, people just are like the Jews or any group, and the hate, let’s try to like turn a hideous incident into maybe a learning experience, as cliche and very unlike me. But I talked to both the culprits, who I know are super involved in it, talked to the families. I’m sending these kids to Auschwitz. They’ve agreed to go, that’s of course, the Holocaust concentration camps...and hopefully learn something. And maybe like their lives aren’t ruined, and they think twice, and more importantly, other people

like see it's not just like words you're throwing around. So to me, that's a fair outcome of this event."

Pennsylvania Senator Dave McCormick applauded Portnoy for addressing the "horrific display of hate" and using it as an opportunity to educate about anti-Jewish violence, saying, "Antisemitism needs to be identified, called out, and crushed."

A few days later, Portnoy gave an update saying he had "revoked" the trip to Poland because at least one of the people involved "is no longer taking responsibility" for the sign.

Though he didn't end up sending the perpetrators to tour Auschwitz, the strategy of responding to antisemitism by sending antisemites for a Holocaust education is nothing new. In 2006, Mel Gibson spewed antisemitic remarks during a DUI arrest. Though not mandated by a court, Gibson met with Jewish leaders and visited the Simon Wiesenthal Center's Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles. In 2014, two British teenagers vandalized a synagogue with antisemitic graffiti. As part of their community service, they were sent to visit Auschwitz. In 2018, Nick Conrad released a controversial music video titled "Hang White People", which contained antisemitic undertones. A French court ordered him to visit the Holocaust Memorial in Paris as part of a court ruling.

The examples could go on and on but the question is, should they? Certainly, Holocaust education is important. Keeping the legacy of 6 million martyrs alive and relevant, teaching the truth about this historically unique genocide matters. But is it the proper or effective response to contemporary antisemitism?

Dara Horn, the author of "People Love Dead Jews," thinks not. In her article, "Is Holocaust Education Making Anti-Semitism Worse? Using dead Jews as symbols isn't helping living ones," she writes: "I have come to the disturbing conclusion that Holocaust education is incapable of addressing contemporary anti-Semitism. In fact, in the total absence of any education about Jews alive today, teaching about the Holocaust might even be making anti-Semitism worse."

She writes: "The Holocaust educators I met across America were all obsessed with building empathy, a quality that relies on finding commonalities between ourselves and others. But I wondered if a more effective way to address anti-Semitism might lie in cultivating a completely different quality, one that happens to be the key to education itself: curiosity. Why use Jews as a means to teach people that we're all the same, when the demand that Jews be just like their neighbors is exactly what embedded the mental virus of anti-Semitism in the Western mind in the first place? Why not instead encourage inquiry about the diversity, to borrow a de rigueur word, of the human experience?"

This article was published in May of 2023, five months before the most murderous day of Jews since the Holocaust, and I fear her thesis has only been strengthened. Teaching only about the Holocaust without teaching about the Jewish people, Jewish values and ideals, Jewish contributions to the world, Jewish culture and practice only focuses on Jews as victims. But today's antisemite learns about the Holocaust and sees the Jewish people as the committer of a current genocide instead of the victim, as perpetrating a Holocaust instead of experiencing one.

Another famous Jew has been targeted with hate for his Judaism, but he has responded in a very different way. Michael Rapaport is an award-winning actor, comedian and podcaster. Since October 7 he has not only visited Israel countless times, he has relentlessly dedicated his online influence to advocating for Israel and the Jewish people. Asked about how October 7 impacted him, he said, "My Judaism has changed 100%. I am more in tune with it. I'm more proud, I'm more aware, I'm more educated. I'm more proactive in every single way possible and I'm really glad about that." Asked how his belief in God has changed, he answered: "I believe in God in a different way. I believe in Hashem in a different way. I celebrate and understand him in a different way. I think we have nothing but faith. You have to have faith. That's been one of the good things that has come from this last year for me personally." Michael Rapaport now wraps tefillin and

says about it, "Every single time is a blessing, every single time is a Mitzvah."

Certainly, we must confront antisemites, hold them accountable, throw the book at them and, when possible, seek to reform them. Educating may be a first step, but it cannot be the whole strategy. The answer is to not focus on their education, like Dave Portnoy did, but to focus on ours, as Michael Rapaport is. Our response to acts of antisemitism must be more Jewish pride, more Jewish practice, stronger Jewish identity, increased Torah observance.

Rather than reward the hateful hoodlums with a trip to Poland, Portnoy should announce he is going to Israel. He should put on a Magen Dovid necklace if not a yarmulka, hang a mezuzah on his home and office, engage his Judaism and Jewish learning in a meaningful way.

When doing one of his famous pizza reviews, before he takes a bite and gives a score, Portnoy proudly announces "one bite, everyone knows the rules." But the truth is, while everyone may know the rules, he does not follow them: he doesn't take one bite, he takes several and when the pizza tastes particularly good, he can't help himself from finishing the whole slice. Describing a relationship with Hashem, Dovid HaMelech (Tehillim 34:9) taught, Ta'amu u'ru ki tov Hashem, taste and you will see that Hashem is good. Why does he employ the word taste, why not just say see that Hashem is good? Faith begins with practice. You can't just listen, read about or think about Hashem, you must engage, act and then you will see with clarity a life of meaning, purpose and eternity. It begins with a taste, a little something and you will want more.

We must confront antisemitism but not just with stories or tours of Jewish victimhood. Instead of focusing on educating others, educate yourself, your children and Jews all around us to be living richly proud and practicing Jewish lives.

Start with one thing. Just one bite of a mitzvah and you will want more and more.

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

May 22, 2025, 3:23 AM

subject: Rav Kook on Behar: Jubilee - National Reconciliation

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**Behar: Jubilee - National Reconciliation**

**Rav Kook Torah**

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

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

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

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

**National Sabbath Rest**

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

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

growth: the Sabbath on the individual level, and the Sabbatical year on the national level.

#### Healing Rifts in Society

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

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

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

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

#### Atonement for the Nation

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

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from: [nachmankahanaweb@gmail.com](mailto:nachmankahanaweb@gmail.com)

date: May 21, 2025, 2:03 PM

subject: **Rabbi Nachman Kahana** The Parsha & Current Events

#### Global Natural Disasters

There is an undeniable increase in global natural disasters, particularly those related to weather and climate. Key Trends: Increased Frequency, Intensity and severity especially floods, storms, heatwaves, and wildfires. Climate change is widely recognized as the main factor. Rising global temperatures lead to more intense rainfall and increased flood risks due to the atmosphere holding more moisture. Stronger and wetter hurricanes and tropical storms, with increased wind speeds and storm surges. Longer and more extreme droughts, contributing to wildfires and water scarcity. The number of natural disasters causing over a billion dollars in damage has significantly increased. In the U.S. alone, the average number of such disasters per year has risen from 3.3 in the 1980s to over 17 from 2014-2023. Floods are the most frequently occurring natural disaster globally, while wildfires are growing in scale, frequency and intensity in many regions, as well as tropical cyclones and storms. Overwhelming evidence points to a genuine and significant rise in natural disasters, largely driven by the accelerating impacts of climate change.

But the question is, the immediate cause of the increase in global natural disasters could well be climate change, but what is causing the climate change?

Prophecy The idea of HaShem’s retribution towards nations who have in the past and the present harmed the Jewish people is a prominent theme throughout the TaNach linked to historical events and end-times prophecies. For example: The Covenant (Brit) with Avraham (Bereishiet 12:3): **אֶבְרָהָה מִבְרָכִיךְ אָאָר וּבְרָכוּ בְּךָ כָּל מִשְׁפָחַת הָאָדָמָה** “I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be (eventually) blessed through you.”

**כִּי כָּאָמַר הָאֱלֹהִים צָבָאָת אֶחָד כְּבָדָלָה כִּי הַנֶּעָזֶן בְּכֶם נֶעָזֶן בְּבָתָה עַתָּה:** For this is what the Lord Almighty says, After the Glorious One has sent me against the nations that have plundered you: for whoever touches you, touches the apple of his (own) eye, I will surely raise my hand against them so that their slaves (or foreign residents) will plunder them.

Οvadiah 1,15: כִּי קָרוּב יוֹם הָאֵלֶּה עַל כָּל הָגּוּם כִּאֵשׁ יְעַשֵּׂה לְךָ גָּמְלָךְ יְשֻׁבָּרָאשֶׁךָ The day of the Lord is near for all nations. As you have done, it will be done to you; your deeds will return upon your own head.

וְיָרְאָתֶם: וְקַבְצָתִי אֶת-כָּל-הָגּוּם וְקַרְאָתִי אֶל-עַמָּקָה הַהֲשִׁפְתָּא וְשִׁפְטָתָא עֲלֵיכֶם שְׁמָם עַל-עַמָּךְ: In those days and at that time, when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem, I will gather all nations and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat. There I will put them on trial for what they did to my inheritance, my people Israel, because they scattered my people among the nations and divided up my land.

The prophecies of Yechezkel, Yishayahu and Yirmiyahu contain extensive prophecies against nations as a consequence of their treatment of Am Yisrael.

Consequences In the year preceding the Exodus from Egypt HaShem brought upon the Egyptians ten plagues for their part of putting into practice the deprived commandments of Paro. Blood, Frogs, lice, Wild Animals, Pestilence, Boils, Hail, Locust, Darkness and the “coup de grace” – Death of the Egyptian firstborns.

We are now witnessing so-called “enlightened nations” who are threatening Medinat Yisrael with economic and political sanctions over our defensive war against Arab Islamic Nazis fueled by thousands of years of their anti-Jew hatred.

The leaders of this are the “enlightened” European nations and others – all members of the U.N. – who are now “suffering” conscious pangs for the long-suffering unfortunate peace-loving residents of Gaza. Their ranks include western nations which were once friendly but are now moving towards our worst enemies in an act of betrayal.

In this week’s Torah reading, which includes the section called Tochacha (admonishment; warning of what will happen if we do not obey the Torah) that enumerates graphically one by one, the punishment HaShem has for the Jewish nation if we depart from the Torah way of life. Unfortunately, each one has come about and even some that are not mentioned on the list. We might be seeing now the beginning of the period where one evil nation wages war on another evil one, while in the background their countries are being ravaged by HaShem’s manipulation of natural disasters.

Time will tell. Shabbat Shalom, Nachman Kahana

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Fw from [AllenKlein@gmail.com](mailto:AllenKlein@gmail.com)

<https://en.yhb.org.il/revivim1145/>

#### Rabbi Eliezer Melamed

#### The Awakening of Heresy in Recent Generations

#### Revivim

In recent generations, human consciousness has developed and expanded greatly, while the study and clarification of faith has not been sufficiently established to cope with this • Many people who were accustomed to praying and fulfilling commandments in order to be saved from hunger and plague, from poverty and subjugation, felt less need to pray and fulfill commandments • Out of concern that scientific studies might lead to heresy, there were rabbis who fought against them, but as the scientific position develops, so God’s word is revealed through it with additional illumination • The more we clarify faith and refine the guidance of the Torah, the more faith in God and His Torah will return to beat in hearts

Q: What caused most of the Jewish public in recent generations to not observe Torah and commandments as in the past, and what should we do to correct the situation?

A: Generally speaking, in recent generations, following the development of the natural sciences, human understanding, society, and human culture in all its varieties – human consciousness has developed and expanded greatly, while the study and clarification of faith (in Hebrew, ‘emunah’) has not been sufficiently established to cope with this. The more we clarify faith and refine the guidance of the Torah, the more faith in God and His Torah will return to beat in the hearts of people. I addressed this topic in the final chapter of my new book “Faith and Its Commandments” (within the “Peninei Halakha” series). Here, I will mention the part concerning the clash between

faith and science, presenting the appropriate position, alongside various arguments.

#### Science Replaced Religion for Those of Lower Faith

One of the things that changed in the modern era is that many natural phenomena that were not understood by humans have been researched, and have become understandable, and explainable. In the process, the value of some explanations about faith that were accepted in previous generations have been nullified.

In the past, when the skies were closed and no rain fell – wheat did not grow, water reserves were depleted, and people died of thirst and hunger. When an epidemic spread – many people fell victim without having almost any way to defend themselves against the death that lurked for them. Even in daily life, humans were exposed to severe dangers, such as snake bites and the development of infectious diseases. In distress, people turned to God in prayer for help, and religious leaders encouraged people to pray and fulfill commandments, so that God would save them.

In contrast, in recent generations, methods have been developed for storing water and transporting it through pipes, so that even during severe drought, people do not die of hunger and thirst. Thanks to scientific research, vaccines and treatments have been found for diseases that were previously incurable, and dangerous epidemics hardly ever break out. Thus, life expectancy has increased greatly. With the help of social sciences, effective methods for organizing society and economy have been developed, and methods have been developed to provide relief for mental illnesses. With the development of technology, the production of food, furniture, clothing and houses has improved greatly, to the extent that today, an average person can live longer, and in more comfortable conditions, than the great kings of the past.

In such a situation, many people who were accustomed to praying and fulfilling commandments in order to be saved from hunger and plague, from poverty and subjugation, felt less need to pray and fulfill commandments. Their feeling was that science would continue to develop until it solved all human distress, and religion would have no place in the world.

#### The Response of Religious Leaders

In contrast, spiritual and religious leaders correctly argued that it is impossible for science to solve all human distress, since humans aspire to lives full of boundless moral and spiritual meaning, while science can only provide comfortable living conditions, and nothing more. Therefore, such presumption will lead to bitter disappointment and severe crises, and it is the evil inclination that tempts humans to become proud and think that by their own power and might, they can understand nature and improve their living conditions.

#### The Appropriate Response

However, no less than criticism of the exaggerated presumption, it would have been appropriate to rejoice in the development of science, and to bless and thank God for it, since God is the one who created humans in the divine image, and endowed them with intelligence through which they can advance in understanding their world and improving their lives. Our Sages even instituted a blessing upon seeing a wise person from among the nations of the world: "Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe, who has given of His wisdom to flesh and blood." (Peninei Halakha: Brachot 15:18). Moreover, it would have been possible to see in all the solutions that science provided to human distress, an opportunity to rise to a higher level of faith. For in the previous situation where humans felt constant anxiety about natural disasters, most people connected to God out of fear of punishment, with a sense of coercion, that if they did not fulfill the commandments, they would be punished in this world, or the next. Only certain individuals merited connecting to God out of love. And now, thanks to technological advancements, turning to God no longer needs to be just for salvation from harm, but primarily out of pure desire, and thus we can merit a higher illumination of faith, and adherence to God. As it is said:

"And it shall be on that day, says the Lord, you will call Me 'my husband' and will no longer call Me 'my master.' And I will remove the names of the Baalim from her mouth, and they shall no longer be mentioned by their name. And I will make a covenant for them on that day with the beasts of the

field, with the birds of the sky and the creeping things of the ground; and I will break bow, sword, and war from the earth, and I will make them lie down in safety. And I will betroth you to Me forever; and I will betroth you to Me with righteousness, and with justice, and with loving-kindness, and with mercy. And I will betroth you to Me with faithfulness; and you shall know the Lord." (Hosea 2:18-22).

#### The Result of the Confrontation

In practice, many religious figures continued to base their arguments on belittling man, and warned that the evil inclination is what tempts him to become proud and think that by his own power and might he can understand nature and improve his living conditions. Thus, instead of appreciating the fruits of scientific achievements and blessing God for them, they believed that one should distance oneself from science, and doubt its reliability. Meanwhile, many people who appreciated science felt that religion was not beneficial to their lives and to the world.

#### Confrontation between Science and Religion

Within the framework of scientific discoveries, concepts that were accepted by religious people, as well as by the rest of humanity, were rejected. For example, it was commonly thought that the sun revolves around the Earth, and scientists discovered that the Earth revolves around the sun. It was commonly thought that there are no tiny invisible creatures in the world, and it was discovered, through microscope observation, that they exist. On the other hand, various religious figures saw the scientists' challenge to old concepts as an affront to the honor of religion, since it seemed impossible that scientists could know more than the distinguished religious scholars who lived in the past and agreed with the science accepted in their days. Not only that, but sometimes the Sages of Israel used analogies from the science that was accepted in their days to explain spiritual ideas, and when scientists refuted the old scientific positions, some saw this as an offense to their honor and to their Torah teachings, because they thought that the analogies were also Torah.

#### The Debate about the Age of the World

It was accepted among the Sages of Israel that the world was created less than six thousand years ago, while scientists in the fields of geology and physics claimed that the Earth has existed for billions of years. Additionally, various theories were developed about the gradual, evolutionary development of humans from lower animals like apes, while in the Torah there is no mention of this. Thus, a feeling was created as if science contradicts the Torah.

#### The Proper Response

There should not have been a confrontation, since the position of the Sages of Israel towards the various sciences is positive, therefore, they encouraged their students to study them (Shabbat 75a), and Rambam (Maimonides) considered the natural sciences as part of the great wisdom called "the work of creation" (Rambam in his commentary on the Mishnah, Haggigah 2:1); and the Vilna Gaon said that to the extent that a person lacks knowledge in other wisdoms, so too, he will lack a hundredfold in the wisdom of Torah, because Torah and wisdom are closely linked together (Peninei Halakha: Likutim A 1:15).

Also, there cannot be a contradiction between faith and science, since the Torah explains the idea of creation, and not the detailed process of creation. Therefore, the six days of creation can be interpreted as six eras that lasted billions of years. It is also possible to explain that the process of creation occurred gradually, as explained in the theory of evolution (Orot HaKodesh 2:537). And even the Sages of Israel said that "the work of creation" is a secret, and consequently, one should not adhere to its literal interpretation. It can also be explained that the Torah's intention is to describe the order of the revelation of faith to humans, and therefore, it begins with the story of Adam, in whom God breathed a divine soul, and he was the first who could hear God's voice, and choose whether to fulfill His command. And this does not negate the existence of ancient creatures from which Adam evolved.

#### In Practice, Confrontation Emerged

Many religious scholars, from Israel and from the nations of the world, saw in the challenge to the science that was accepted in the past, an affront to the

great religious scholars. And when the position of scientists contradicted descriptions that are apparently written in the Torah about the creation of the world, it was perceived as complete heresy. Thus, among some rabbis, the position developed that science is dangerous to religion, and it should be fought against – or at least have its status weakened. To strengthen their position, various religious figures began to collect cases where scientists were wrong, cases where scientific developments caused harm, and cases where “all the doctors” said someone would die, and that individual went to a righteous person who prayed for him, and was healed.

Moreover, out of concern that scientific studies might lead to heresy, there were rabbis who fought against them. To strengthen their position, there arose some who claimed that there is no need to study sciences, since it is possible to learn all of them from the Torah.

However, with the help of science, ways continued to be breached to enhance the human ability to create machines, accelerate agriculture, develop industry, commerce, means of transportation and communication, and accumulate immeasurable wealth. And as religious representatives intensified their fight against science, criticism of religion increased.

#### The Key to Correction in the Purification of Faith

Maran Rabbi Kook explained (Orot, Zeronim, ‘Yisurim Mamrikim’) that all the confusions and complications in human life stem from a lack of understanding of the concept of divinity, which is an infinite sea. Naturally, a person longs for closeness to God, and consequently is interested in defining Him. However, God is above and beyond any perception and definition. We can only grasp what is revealed to us, and therefore, what can be said about God is that He is the single source of all ideas and values, powers and creations. And anyone who tries to define God Himself, or even the entire illumination that He bestows, sins with a trace of idolatry, limits the revelation of His light to certain domains, and disowns good ideas and values that also reveal His word.

In other words, when faith is defined in a narrow way, it does not contain all the ideas that are revealed in the world, and consequently, there is seemingly a collision between faith and that idea. Thus, when religious people believe that God is revealed only through the scientific explanation accepted until now, a collision is created between faith and the new scientific positions. However, in truth, God is above all the scientific positions throughout the generations, since in every scientific position a divine spark is revealed, as appropriate for that generation. And as the scientific position develops, so God’s word is revealed through it with additional illumination.

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

By Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Verse – Promise

3 – The Condition

4 – Bountiful Crops

5 – Plenty and Security

6 – Peace in the Land

## 7-8 – Military Success

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

10 – Bountiful Crops (again!)

11 – God's Sanctuary in our Midst

12 – God's Presence in our Midst

13 – Concluding Sentence

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

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

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

## II. UNDERSTANDING THE CONDITION

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

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

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

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

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

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

## III. ENGAGED ACTION

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

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

## INTEGRATED ACTION

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

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

## IV. YASHAN NOSHAN

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

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

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

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

## V. MAKING ROOM FOR THE GRAIN

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

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

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

We can now understand the continuum of the blessing. Subsequent to our own development as a strong and secure nation (see below), the Torah promises us that the covenant – of our being a blessing to the nations of the world – will be fulfilled WITH US. In other words, instead of this covenant being a B'rit Avot, which is operative even if we fail in our tasks, the covenant will be directly with us – in our own merit. That blessing will be enabled first by developing an association with other nations – through the commerce of exporting the goods of the Land.

## **VI. AND ONCE WE HAVE SUCCEEDED...**

From this verse on, where we would reasonably have the concern that once we have drawn the nations of the world to us and they have rallied around the cry “Let us go up to the mountain of the House of God, that He will instruct us of His ways...”

Therefore, the next few verses promise us that our special relationship with God will not only be maintained – but that it will be intensified, hinting at a return to the intimate relationship enjoyed by Man and God in the Garden of Eden (“I will walk among you”; compare with B’resheet 3:8.)

This also explains why these “rewards” are necessary. In order for us to make our impression on the nations of the world, giving us the opportunity to teach, we must have our own stable, safe and economically sound nation. It is hard to develop a holy nation when the threat of war or hunger is constantly over our head; God’s blessings insure that we can more easily fulfill our task and lead the world to a full awareness of the Creator and His moral guidance.

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## **PARSHAT BEHAR**

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

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

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

### **INTRODUCTION**

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

- 1) Chapters 1-17: laws relating to the **mishkan** itself,
- 2) Chapters 18-27: laws relating to living a life of 'kedusha' even **outside** the mishkan.

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

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

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

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

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

### **STORY TIME?**

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

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

### **MORE PROBLEMS!**

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

The first pasuk of Parshat Behar (25:1) informs us that these mitzvot were given on **Har Sinai**, and hence suggests that this

entire Parsha may really belong in Sefer Shmot!

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

- \* "For Bnei Yisrael are servants to Me, they My servants whom I freed from the land of Egypt, I am the Lord your God." (25:55).
- \* "Do not make for yourselves any other gods.." (26:1).
- \* "Keep My Sabbath and guard My Temple, I am your God" (26:2).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **WHERE DO THEY BELONG?**

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

### **THE NER TAMID (24:1-4)**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### A BACKWARD 'BACK TO SHMOT'

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

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

Let's take a look:

#### THE TOCHACHA (26:3-46)

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### WORKING 'BACKWARDS'

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

(A) - THE TOCHACHA (26:3-46)

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

(C) The laws of SHMITTA & YOVEL (25:1-25:54)

(D) Parshat "ha-MEKALLEL" (24:10-23) - The 'Blasphemer'.

(E) THE MENORA AND SHULCHAN (24:1-9)

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

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

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

Note the obvious textual similarities:

\* "sheshet yamim ta'aseh melacha, u-vayom ha-shvi'i..."

[Vayikra 23:3- Compare with Shmot 35:2!].

\* "ach et shabtotai tishmoru...

ki ani Hashem **mekadishchem**"

[See Shmot 31:13/ compare with 23:3,39.]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## THE CHIASTIC STRUCTURE OF SHMOT & VAYIKRA

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

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

- (A) BRIT - prior to Matan Torah (perek 19 & parallel in perek 24)
- (B) DIBROT - the Ten Commandments (20:1-14)
- (C) MITZVOT - immediately after the dibrot (20:19-23)
- (D) MISHPATIM - the civil laws in Parshat Mishpatim (21->23)
- (E) TZIVUI HA-MISHKAN - Parshiot Truma/Tetzaveh (25->31)
- (F) SHABBAT (31:12-18 followed by 35:1-3)

[In the further iyun section, we discuss why we skip chet ha-egel (32->34) in this structure.]

- (G) LAWS OF THE KORBAN YACHID (Vayikra 1->5)
- (H) LAWS FOR THE KOHANIM - serving in the mishkan (6->7)
- (I) THE SHCHINA ON THE MISHKAN:

The dedication ceremony of the mishkan (8->10);  
laws governing proper entry (11->15);  
the yearly 're-dedication' ceremony on Yom Kippur (16->17)

### AND ITS AFFECT ON THE NATION

Kedushat ha-AM ve-haARETZ

climaxing with "KDOSHIM TIHYU"

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

The following chart illustrates this structure:

A) Brit - before Matan Torah

B) Dibrot

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

B) Dibrot (first 4)

A) Brit - Tochachat Bechukotai

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### BRIT SINAI & KEDOSHIM TIHYU

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

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

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

shabbat shalom  
menachem

### ===== FOR FURTHER IYUN =====

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

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

1. Explain the machloket between Rashi and Ramban.

2. How is their approach to this question different than the approach taken in the above shiur.

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

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

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

## PARSHAT BEHAR - SIGNIFICANT SUMMARIES

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

### AN OVERVIEW OF PARSHAT BEHAR

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

#### I. The LAWS SHMITTA & YOVEL

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

#### II. LAWS RELATING TO THE YOVEL CYCLE

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

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

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

#### THIS LAND IS 'HIS' LAND

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

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

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

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

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

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

Therefore, when Bnei Yisrael receive the Torah at Har Sinai, as they prepare to conquer 'Eretz Canaan', these laws of yovel will help them appreciate the dialectic nature of their forthcoming sovereignty over the land. In relation to the surrounding nations, once Bnei Yisrael achieve conquest - they will become the sovereign power. However, in relation to God, they must constantly remember that the land still belongs to God. He has granted to them only towards the purpose that they become His nation. The laws of yovel, which affect the very nature of property

transactions during the entire fifty year shmitta and yovel cycle, will serve as a constant reminder that God has given them this land for a reason (and purpose).

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

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

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

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

"And God told Aharon, behold I am giving you My **teruma** that I am keeping that Bnei Yisrael have set aside..." (see Bamidbar 18:8).

[This also explains why teruma must be eaten 'be-tahara', for the kohen is eating food given to him by God. In contrast, 'ma'aser rishon' the ten percent tithe given by the Yisrael to the Levite has no kedusha - for it serves as a direct payment for the services that shevet Levi renders to the nation.]

#### RELATED LAWS

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

- 1) His field, or
- 2) Himself.

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

Let's see how each pasuk is special.

#### ERETZ CANAAN IS NOT FOR SALE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

This explains the cases where one was forced to sell his

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

#### **WE ARE SERVANTS OF GOD, NOT MAN**

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

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

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

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

shabbat shalom  
menachem

## Parshat Behar: Mitzvot of Shevi'it and Yovel

by Rabbi Eitan Mayer

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

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

### A LOOK AT THE TEXTUAL LANDSCAPE:

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

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

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

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

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

### THE HOLINESS THEME:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Theme I: Korbanot (perakim 1-10)**

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

**Theme III: Kedusha (perakim 17-27)**

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

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

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

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

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

### **MY PET THEORY ABOUT KEDUSHAH (AGAIN):**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **KEDUSHAH AND RESTRICTION:**

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

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

The connection between restrictions and kedusha is quite direct:

Kedusha = Dedication --> Restricted Access.

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

### **HILLUL:**

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

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

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

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

### **THE KEDUSHAH OF YOVEL AND SHEMITA:**

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

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

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

In other words, Shemita and Yovel bring us:

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

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

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

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

#### **VAYIKRA 25:**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### **SEFER HA-HINNUKH, MITZVAH 84:**

"Among the roots of this mitzvah: to fix in our hearts and vividly paint in our minds the concept of the creation of the world,

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

- 1) Are reward and punishment for our deeds delivered to us here in this life, as the tokhaha seems to imply, or at some later stage beyond the life of this world (or at both points)? [Since this issue is really a philosophical one, we will stick to more concretely textual concerns. Abravanel discusses this issue at length, presenting 7, count 'em, 7 different perspectives.]
- 2) If Hashem is a truly merciful God, can it be that He will really punish us in the horrible ways depicted in the tokhaha? If

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

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

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

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

### **A LOOK AT THE BOOKENDS:**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **MEETING THE CHALLENGE:**

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

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

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

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

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

### **HINTS FROM THE RAMBAM:**

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

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

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

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

[See also 4:27, 8:18]

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

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

## **TWO SIDES OF A COIN:**

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **Rambam, Laws of Fast Days, Chapter 1:**

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

...

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

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

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

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

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

Shabbat Shalom