

BS"D



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## INTERNET PARSHA SHEET ON BEHAR - 5765

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From: [sefira@torah.org](mailto:sefira@torah.org) To: Counting The Omer Reminder List Subject: [Sefira/Omer] Day 27 / 3 weeks and 6 days  
Tonight, the evening of Friday, May 20, will be day 27, which is 3 weeks and 6 days of the omer.

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From: RABBI YISSOCHER FRAND [[ryfrand@torah.org](mailto:ryfrand@torah.org)] Sent: May 19, 2005 To: [ravfrand@torah.org](mailto:ravfrand@torah.org) Subject: Rabbi Frand on Parshas Behar

"RavFrand" List - Rabbi Frand on Parshas Behar -

The Linkage Between Truth and the Exodus

In this week's parsha, the Torah states: "Do not give him your money for interest, and do not give your food for increase. I am Hashem, your G-d, Who took you out of the land of Egypt..." [Vayikra 25:37-38].

Rashi cites a Gemara that explains the connection between the prohibition to charge interest and the Exodus: "I distinguished between a firstborn and one who was not a firstborn. I also know and exact punishment from one who lends to a Jew with interest and says that it belongs to a non-Jew" [Bava Metzia 61b]. [While the Torah permits Jews to lend and borrow commercially with non-Jews, meaning with interest, the Torah demands that loans between Jews be interest-free.]

In other words, G-d knows the facts. If He could discern which person was a first born and which person was not a first born during the Plague of the Firstborn, He can certainly see through any false claims involving interest transactions.

The Gemara has a similar exposition regarding two other pasukim.

Following the command of Tzizis in Parshas Shlach, the verse says: "I am the L-rd, your G-d, who took you out from the Land of Egypt" [Bamidbar 15:41]. Why is this pasuk located in the chapter of Tzizis? Again, the Talmud states "I am the One who distinguished between the drop that was a first born and the drop that was not a first born. I will be able to distinguish and punish someone who places strands of kaleh ilan (a cheap imitation dye) on his clothing and claims it is (authentic) techeles." [ibid]. In other words, G-d, who knew the authentic first born in Egypt, will know and punish someone trying to sell fake techeles as the real thing.

The Torah makes a similar exposition in a third place, in Parshas Kedoshim: "You shall have correct scales, correct stones, a correct ephah, and a correct hin - I am Hashem, your G-d, Who brought you forth from the land of Egypt." [Vayikra 19:36]. Again, the Talmud says, the connection is similar: The G-d, who was able to detect the identity of the true first born in Egypt, will be able to detect any attempt to falsify weights and measures and thereby cheat in business transactions.

Rav Shimon Schwab explains that the common denominator between the expositions by the cases of interest, Tzizis, and weights and measures is that all three represent attempts to deviate from the truth. The Exodus from Egypt (Yetzias Mitzrayim) was the ultimate demonstration of Truth

in the world. At the moment of Exodus there was no faking and no hiding. The Master of the Universe, who is the epitome and essence of Truth, revealed Himself and at that moment, anything that was not true, paid the price.

This G-d, who is the epitome of Truth, will punish those who try to be deceptive - be it in interest transactions, be it in the sale of false techeles, or be it in the use of false measures.

Rav Schwab added that this explains the universal custom of appending the word "Emes" [Truth] to the end of the third chapter of Krias Shma. We append the word "Emes" immediately after the pasuk that states "I am the L-rd your G-d who took you out of the Land of Egypt, to be for you a G-d; I am the L-rd your G-d".

In reality, the word Emes is not part of the recitation of Krias Shma. It is the first word of the next paragraph (Emes v'Yatziv in the morning or Emes v'Emunah at night). It is peculiar that this word should be appended to the Biblically mandated recitation of Krias Shma, since it is not part of the Biblical pasukim. In contrast, we make a clear demarcation between the Biblically mandated portion of the multi-paragraph Grace After Meals, and the additional Rabbinic paragraphs, by inserting the word "Amen" following "Boneh Berachamav Yerushalayim". Why do we blur the demarcation in Krias Shma by appending the word Emes to the Biblical pasuk regarding the Exodus?

The answer is that the word 'Emes' is the essence of the whole idea of Hashem taking us out of Egypt. During Yetzias Mitzrayim, G-d revealed His Essence to us. His Essence is Truth. Consequently, immediately after mentioning the Exodus, we append the word 'Emes'.

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From: TorahWeb.org [[torahweb@torahweb.org](mailto:torahweb@torahweb.org)] Sent: Thursday, May 19, 2005 10:04 PM Subject: Rabbi Yaakov Neuburger - Maintaining Torah Through Healthy Respect

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RABBI YAAKOV NEUBURGER

MAINTAINING TORAH THROUGH HEALTHY RESPECT

As our hair grows longer and less comfortable and we constantly evaluate which events we are allowed to attend, surely we all ponder why the death of Rabbi Akiva's 24,000 students demands this period of national mourning. After all it seems that their demise has had little impact on later generations and yet it is marked so strikingly. True, the sefirah period has since brought great tragedies to our people, often through hatred that was intensified by Easter sermons and acted upon during the ensuing pogroms. Nevertheless at the outset, it was the loss of these scholars to the sin of uncivil behavior to each other that prompted our predecessors to give it a longer mourning period than even the destruction of Yerushalayim.

There is no question that to Rabbi Akiva and his generation, and undoubtedly for several generations later, the tragic death of all the nation's scholars was devastating. It can certainly be compared to our own loss, from which we are still reeling, of generations of European scholars half a century ago. Rabbi Akiva himself testifies (Yevamos 66b) that if not for the group of five talmidim, whom he taught at the end of his life and who "established" Torah, he may have little impact on the Torah we learn today. Our mishna and thus what we have of the oral law is primarily taught and filtered through these five talmidim. The twenty

four thousand students that populated the entire land perished leaving comparatively little behind.

However the gemora (Yevamos 66b) describes the effect of the loss of these scholars in even more profound terms. Until new students were educated and established, "the world became desolate". Where else since creation has the entire natural world been described in such a desperate manner? I am reminded of the tenuous nature of the world in the early morning, just prior to the giving of the Torah. There too the Medrash describes that all of creation was silenced in mortal fright knowing that its very existence would depend on our acceptance of Hashem's Torah. Were we to decline, we are told, the purpose and destiny of the world would be thrown into question. Apparently, a world without an entire generation of scholars to continue our mesorah is of questionable meaning and purpose as well, and perhaps once again our physical survival came into question.

In fact the gemora indicates that the scholars shared in the responsibility of this frightening threat to torah. In relating indications that the death of the Rabbis was not due to unrelated matters, the gemora points to the fact that they all succumbed to the same plague, "askara", and in the same period of the year, between Pesach and Shavuos. Askara is a disease that according to our tradition (Shabbos 33b) attacks amongst others, those who aggressively disrupt the study of torah. Apparently these scholars, who through their mutual disrespect and contentiousness threatened the viability of their very mission in life, were a target for this dreadful disease at a time when they should have been preparing to celebrate and rededicate themselves to that very mission.

Now, we still have to connect the dots. How does the lack of respect amongst a generation of scholars translate into a threat to the mesorah? Further, how could scholars disagree so strongly and act so disrespectfully as to incur such anger that would challenge the viability of mesorah?

Perhaps we have all come across individuals so absolutely dedicated and invested in their ideas that the inner pressure to defend them is enormous. To be sure, it matters little whether the pressure is borne of the risk of lost time and energy or of a tarnished reputation. Nevertheless this pressure can blur the lines between the healthy defense of one's work and the unacceptable lapse of respect for a worthy opponent.

In a not dissimilar fashion, the absolute love and dedication that our scholars have for distilling Hashem's thoughts with precision and the responsibility that comes with it, forges a passionate commitment to their ideas. Nevertheless, as praiseworthy as this passion is, we can learn from Rabbi Akiva's talmidim that if it is not tempered, it can be detrimental to the completeness of Torah. This idea is expressed by Rashi in his interpretation of Shlomo Hamelech's insight (Kohelles, 4:9-10), "Two are better than one for they get a greater return for their labor.

For should one fall one can lift the other, but woe to him who is alone when he falls and there is no one to lift him." Rashi explains that this can refer to the study of Torah and the interdependence that talmidei chachamim share. It follows that the Torah, which Hashem made dependant on people for its retention, transmission and even interpretation, can be impacted upon through human error and must be corrected by other scholars as well,

Therefore maintaining a healthy respect for fellow worthy scholars and being open to them becomes crucial to maintaining the completeness and precision of Torah. The lack of respect for one's peers can threaten the responsibility of a generation to maintain the wholeness of Torah. Evidently these are precious ideas that must be refreshed as we get closer to celebrating Shavuos.

Note: See "Respect and Appreciation for One Another" (TorahWeb.org, Lag B'omer 2004). There we explained how the life of Rabbon Shimon Bar Yochai whose yartzheit is a break in the mourning, came to represent the respect that one must have for every individual and their ability to

develop some aspect of Torah. Thus we can understand why Rashbi's yartzheit was a day when the askara epidemic came to a halt.

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EMES LIYAAKOV

Weekly Insights from

MOREINU HORAV YAAKOV KAMENETZKY zt"l

[Translated by Ephraim Weiss]

Weekly Insights from Moreinu HoRav Yaakov Kamenetzky zt"l

One of the topics discussed in Parshas Behar are the halachos of Yovel, where land that has been sold goes back to its original owner. The pasuk says, "The land will not be sold permanently, for Hashem is the true owner of all the land." Through this halacha, we learn the lesson concerning Yovel that 'our' land cannot be sold permanently, and we are therefore reminded that in truth, our land does not really belong to us, but like everything else in the world, it belongs to Hashem. HaRav Yaakov Kamenetzky zt"l points out that the day Yovel was attached to was Yom Kippur. On Yom Kippur of a Yovel year, the three extra brachos that are recited on Rosh HaShanah (Malchiyos, Zichronos and Shofros) are added into Mussaf. The gemara in Rosh HaShanah [27] asks how this is possible? Included in these three Brachos is the phrase, "OWYH HZ VY\$EM TLXT, Today is the day on which Hashem created the world." Rav Yaakov says that based on what we just established, that the lesson of Yovel is the belief in maasei Bireishis, and that the day Yovel was dependant on was Yom Kippur, we can now answer the gemara's question. Even though the world was not created on Yom Kippur, Yom Kippur is still a day of remembrance of creation.

Rav Yaakov continues by pointing out that this idea can be applied to halacha lema'ase. There is a halacha that someone who is purposely mechalel Shabbos in public, knowing that it is wrong, and with the intention to mock the Shabbos, is not considered a Jew. If such a person cooks, the food is considered bishul akum; food made by a non-Jew, and if such a person touches wine, the wine becomes yayin nesech; wine considered to be used by a non-Jew for idol worship. This is because Shabbos represents the fact that Hashem created the world. If a person rejects Shabbos, it is as if he is rejecting this belief. There is a discussion amongst the Achronim, as to whether this halacha applies only to Shabbos, or also to Yom Kippur. According to what we just established, that Yom Kippur is also a day that celebrates Hashem's creations of the world, this halacha would apply to Yom Kippur as well.

Rav Yaakov concludes, by offering a proof to this halacha. There is a mishnah in Megillah [1:5] that states, "There is no difference between Shabbos and Yom Kippur, except that the punishment for desecration of Shabbos is death, and the punishment for desecration of Yom Kippur is kares." This mishnah implies that there are no other differences. We therefore see that the halacha as stated before applies to Yom Kippur as well. May we truly utilize the Shabbos and it's surrounding Yomim Tovim, until the day we will celebrate the greatest holiday of all.

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From: Rabbi Goldwicht [rgoldwicht@yutorah.org] Sent: May 19, 2005

The Weekly Sichah - RABBI MEIR GOLDWICHT

Every Man to his Field

Our parasha opens with the laws of shemittah and yovel. At the end of the Torah's discussion of Yovel, the Torah says, "V'kidashtem et shnat hachamishim shanah ukratem dror ba'aretz l'chol yoshveha...v'shavtem ish el achuzato v'ish el mishpachto tashuvu" (VaYikra 25:10). Rashi explains: "V'shavtem ish el achuzato: the fields return to their owners."

The difficulty with Rashi's explanation is that it is exactly the opposite of what is written in the passuk—the Torah writes that every person returns to his field, *ish el achuzato*, whereas Rashi writes that the field returns to its owner! Why does Rashi write the exact opposite of the passuk?

Rather, Rashi is coming to teach us the meaning of the word "dror," which appears for the first time in the context of yovel. The word *dror* has three meanings in *lashon hakodesh*: 1) When HaKadosh Baruch Hu commands Moshe to prepare the ketoret, He tells Moshe that the first spice he must obtain is "mor," but that he should obtain "mor-dror," as the passuk says, "V'atah kach lecha b'samim rosh, mor dror" (Shemot 30:23). The Ramban explains that *dror* indicates "naki miziyuf," free of counterfeit – since *mor* was very expensive and difficult to obtain, it was a spice that was often counterfeited. HaKadosh Baruch Hu commanded Moshe to make sure he obtained the real *mor*, *mor-dror*. 2) The second explanation of *dror* is *chofesh*, freedom, as it says in Yeshayahu, "Likro lishvuyim dror" (61:1). 3) *Dror* is also a type of bird. What is special about this bird is that, while most houses have a roof, this bird lives in a "roofless" nest, with no interruption between the nest and the sky. This allows it a direct connection to HaKadosh Baruch Hu – all it needs to do is to simply lift its eyes and look skyward. We have a rule in *lashon hakodesh* that if a word has more than one meaning, the synthesis of all the meanings provides the one true explanation of the word; the case of *dror* is no exception.

Yovel does not mean that a person returns to the house he sold earlier or to the field he sold earlier. The reason a person sold his house is that he was enslaved to his money and to his business dealings – his money became his owner. His enslavement removed his ability to determine his own *seder hayom* – whether to get up in the morning for davening, whether to set aside times for learning. Rather, yovel is a chance to start over, to contemplate past mistakes and to build a new life. It is a chance to take control back over one's property and over one's *seder hayom*.

Therefore, the greatest compliment you can give a person is to call him a "ba'al habayit." Someone who is truly the ba'al of his bayit – determining his own *seder hayom*, able to spend time with his wife and children, and able to learn Torah – truly experiences *dror*. He is *naki miziyuf*, he is free, and he has an uninterrupted connection to HaKadosh Baruch Hu. This is the deeper meaning of Rashi: what is special about the yovel is that control returns from the property to the owner.

How amazing is it that the yovel begins on Yom Kippur, the day a person feels more *naki miziyuf* and more connected to Hashem than any other day of the year. The idea of yovel is for the feelings of Yom Kippur to linger with you for the entire year. And essentially, what happens on Yom Kippur in a major way happens every Shabbat in a smaller way. On Shabbat, a person has more time to learn, to contemplate, to clean himself from contamination, and to strengthen his connection to HaKadosh Baruch Hu. How amazing, then, that on Shabbat we sing *Dror Yikra*. Perhaps this is also the reason why some have the minhag to begin *kiddush* on Shabbat morning with "Im tashiv mishabbat...v'karata lashabbat oneg" (Yeshayahu 58:13), *pesukim* that come from the haftarah read on the morning of Yom Kippur.

Our parasha teaches us the importance of a proper set of priorities. The more we work on setting our priorities from the proper perspective and the more we try to increase *kevod shamayim* through our actions, the more we will feel *dror* – *nekiut*, *chofesh*, and connection to Hashem – and the closer we will come to the time of "v'shavtem ish el achuzato v'ish el mishpachto tashuvu."

Shabbat Shalom! Meir Goldwicht

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Jerusalem Post May 20, 2005 [www.rabiwein.com/jpost-index.html](http://www.rabiwein.com/jpost-index.html)  
RABAN SHIMON BEN YOCHAI <http://rabiwein.com/column-916.html>

One of the leading figures in Jewish history, one who is intimately connected with the *sefira* period of the Jewish calendar through which we are now passing, is Raban Shimon ben Yochai. This great sage who lived in the second century of the Common Era was a primary disciple of Rabbi Akiva. He inherited from his great mentor a strong antipathy towards Roman rule and culture. After the defeat of Bar Kochba and the persecutions of the rabbis by Hadrian, there was an attempt to somehow restore normalcy between the Jewish community in Judea and its Roman masters. At this time when some of the rabbis openly praised the efforts of the Romans in rebuilding the physical infrastructure of the land, others remained noncommittal. Raban Shimon ben Yochai however was outspoken in his condemnation of the Roman authorities, stating that even the seemingly "positive" actions that they took all stemmed from evil and sinister motives. When Jewish collaborators with Rome reported Raban Shimon ben Yochai's words to the Roman authorities, a warrant for his arrest was issued. Raban Shimon, together with his son Elazar, fled to the desert and found refuge in a cave near to a brook of water and a flourishing carob tree. Thus nurtured by the carobs and the water, the father and son spent thirteen years in hiding, studying Torah and rising to great spiritual heights. They had already become a legend in their own time amongst the Jews because of their holiness of character and behavior.

Jewish tradition attributes to Raban Shimon the authorship of the main ideas of the Zohar, the kabalistic book of Jewish mysticism and spirituality. It was during this long and isolated sojourn in the desert cave that Raban Shimon was able to delve into the hidden, secretive level of Torah and comment and explain its mysteries. The book of the Zohar itself would still remain in an unpublished and hidden state until the fourteenth century when it would be publicized by a Spanish Jew, Moses de Leon. Though there has been much debate over the centuries as to the authorship of the Zohar, tradition holds fast that Raban Shimon ben Yochai is the source of the book. When the Romans relented and annulled the warrant for their arrest, Raban Shimon ben Yochai and his son emerged from their cave home and returned to the society of the Land of Israel. However, by this time Raban Shimon had achieved such a level of spirituality that he could not countenance the ordinary workday activities of his fellow-Jews who did not spend every waking moment in the study of Torah. A voice from heaven called out to him: "Have you emerged from your cave to destroy My world? If so, that you cannot tolerate the ordinary behavior of others, then return to your cave!" Though no longer critical of others' mundane life behavior, Raban Shimon, his son and his disciples declared that torat umnatan Torah alone was their sole occupation and pursuit in life. Because of this exemplary self-sacrifice on behalf of the study of Torah, Raban Shimon and those who followed his example of Torah study were exempted from the performance of other mitzvot, even including daily prayer. He who devotes one's self to Torah study exclusively is freed from many of the burdens of society and government.

Tradition ascribes the day of Lag B'Omer – the semi-holiday of the thirty-third day of the *sefira* period – as the anniversary of the passing of Raban Shimon ben Yochai. Tradition has also assigned Mount Meron in the Upper Galilee as the burial site of Raban Shimon and his son, Elazar. Over the past centuries, a custom has arisen for Jews to visit that site on Lag B'Omer to commemorate the passing of the great Raban Shimon ben Yochai. Large bonfires are lit, young boys are given their first haircut and entire families encamp on Mount Meron in commemoration of the day and the great men buried there. The custom

of bonfires has spread from Mount Meron throughout the rest of Israel and the Jewish world as well, though there is much rabbinic opinion that disapproves of this custom. Nevertheless, it is apparently here to stay, acrid smoke and dangerous sparks notwithstanding. The combination of Raban Shimon ben Yochai's fierce opposition to Roman ways, his great personal holiness, his unbelievable superhuman devotion to Torah study and his contributions to the rebuilding of Jewish life after the Hadrianic persecutions, all combine to make him one of the giants of Jewish history and tradition.

Parsha May 20, 2005

<http://www.rabbiwein.com/parsha-index.html>

B'HAR

<http://rabbiwein.com/column-917.html>

The main lesson of the parsha of B'har leaps out at you from its beginning verses. The lesson is that nothing in this world or life is permanent. G-d tells us that the "land shall not be sold on a permanent basis for all of the earth belongs unto Me." We are aware of the fact that we are not here on a permanent basis. It is our mortality that gives us dread and only our belief in immortality and eternal life, in generations that follow after us in the Torah way of life, that grants us hope and surcease. All of the accumulations of life, be they wealth or physical possessions, even our own health and well-being, are only temporary and fleeting. The Torah wanted us to become accustomed to this fact of life and to factor it into all of our decisions and behavior. Therefore, it provided us with the institution of yoveil - the Jubilee year. In that year everything is restored to a previous state. The servant nor the land no longer belong to their erstwhile owners. The permanence of our impermanence is established through the yoveil year. We are only trustees, temporary users of what we have in this world. But in effect it all belongs to G-d, as do we ourselves. Therefore, the understanding that things and situations and possessions are temporary and changeable teaches us to use those things, situations and possessions wisely and for the greatest ultimate spiritual and moral benefit of others and ourselves. "The silver and the gold belongs to Me, says the Lord of Hosts." These words of the prophet should always be considered in dealing with our finances and material possessions.

B'har also includes the constant theme of Jewish social justice and human equality in its words. The shmita and yoveil years outlined in the parsha were social and economic levelers. They served as a brake on an oligarchy of wealthy landowners and kept the economic balance between groups and individuals in Jewish society intact. The lower class was thus raised and the distances between it and the upper and wealthier classes narrowed. One of the outstanding features of the shmita year was the concept of the forgiveness of debt. Even though this concept was later modified by Hillel and the rabbis with the establishment of the prozbul, which enabled loans to be preserved and collectible even after the shmita year, the notion that debt that was a criminal offense - a notion that persisted in world society in debtors' prisons until the twentieth century - was negated. All later concepts of bankruptcy and debt forgiveness, of giving a debtor a chance to begin again, of valuing a human being over money, all stem from this Torah provision regarding shmita and yoveil. The Torah never viewed economic policy and financial matters to be outside the purview of its values and moral directions. In fact, these values and laws themselves that are based on the previously mentioned reality of the temporary in life. Since all belongs to G-d, He is entitled, so to speak, to regulate the assets with which He has entrusted to us. This is an important idea to remember in living our every day lives.

Shabat shalom. Rabbi Berel Wein

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From: Torah MiTzion [mailto:[torahmitzion.org](mailto:torahmitzion.org)] Sent: May 18, 2005  
Subject: Torah MiTzion E-Bulletin: Parshat Bahar  
bs'd Shabbat Shalom from Torah MiTzion Issue 89: Parshat Behar 20-21  
May 2005, 12 Iyar 5765 / 27 la'Omer

The Location of Vayikra in the Chumash

by RAV MOSHE PINCHUK, former Rosh Kollel, Melbourne

Genesis and Exodus read as a continuous story, beginning with the Creation, slowly twisting their way through the Forefathers down into Egypt and up again into redemption. Numbers and Deuteronomy pick up the thread of narrative once more, leading us through four decades of desert life and bringing us to the threshold of the Promised land. Between these two units lies Leviticus, a labyrinth of Ritual and temple legalities violently disrupting the flow of Pentateuch narrative. An explanation regarding the location of Leviticus within the Pentateuch is thus in order. The Medrash describing Leviticus as top of the list in ancient school curriculum is yet another expression of this problem.

A solution can perhaps be offered if we ask a hypothetical question - What would have happened had the Sin of the Spies not occurred? Genesis and Exodus would have remained untouched, of Numbers only the first ten chapters would have remained, the remainder would never have occurred and of course the need for Deuteronomy would have been obviated. In this description Leviticus is no longer in the center of the Pentateuch but in its proper location as an appendix at the end of the narrative.

In a parenthetical remark it is of interest to note that Leviticus is approximately 400 verses short of the average size of the books of the Pentateuch. Appending the first ten chapters of Numbers to (the beginning of) Leviticus would have enlarged Leviticus to the average size.

The Tragedy and Sin of the Spies, however, did take place, thus adding four decades of desert life and two books to the Pentateuch. Suddenly, Leviticus is out of place, two books now follow in its wake. Leviticus now interrupts the narrative, a silent scar and remnant to the tragedy of the Spies and to what could have been.

A careful scrutiny of Leviticus can reveal remnants of its original location as the last and final book of the Pentateuch:

This week's portion, Behar describes the obligation of Shemita, this is curious and out of context in relation to the prevalent subject material of Leviticus. Seforno explains its location here at the end of Leviticus:

"Moses mentions this subject (shemita) here, because he thought they were to immediately enter the land, as is demonstrated in his statement, 'we are now traveling to the place'. He warned us regarding the Shemita in particular for its violation will be punished by expulsion from the land".

The closing verse of Leviticus sounds like a very appropriate way to end the Pentateuch: "These are the commands that Hashem commanded Moses to the Children of Israel at Mount Sinai". Indeed the Medrash Halacha offers commentary in this spirit:

"These are the commands" - A prophet may not add anything new to this corpus. "that Hashem commanded Moses" - the messenger is worthy of his mission. "To the children of Israel" - the messenger is worthy of his nation and the nation of the messenger.

Doubt in Reciting Brachot

RAV MOSHE ABERMAN

Yeshivat Har Etzion, former Rosh Kollel, Chicago

Have I said a beracha on this food or not? What should a person who finds himself in this predicament do? To answer this question we must first determine whether the requirement to recite the beracha is Mi'deorita (of biblical origin) or Mi'derabanan (of rabbinic origin).

Berachot for food may be divided into two groups, those recited before eating and those recited after eating. Each group can be subdivided into three groups according to the berachot recited after eating. The sub-groups would be those foods for which we recite Birkat Hamazon, those for which we recite a Beracha Me'ein Shalosh (Al Hamichya) and those for which Borei Nefashot is said. One could differentiate in Beracha Me'ein Shalosh between fruit included in Shivat Ha'minin and baked goods but we will not touch on that.

In Devarim 8/10 we read "Veachalta Vesavata u'verachta et Hashem Elokecha al haaretz hatova asher natan lach", and you shall eat and be satiated and then you shall bless G-d for the good land he has given you. The Midrash Halacha on Parshat Bo (Mechilta Bo parsah 16) as well as the Gemara in Berachot (21a and 48b) relate the Beracha in this pasuk to Birkat Hamazon. Accordingly it is agreed by the commentaries and poskim that Birkat Ha'mazon is mi'deorita.

In the Berita found in Gemara Berachot (48b) we learn that not only must one recite the Birkat Hamazon but one should recite a beracha (Hamotzi) before eating bread as well. This requirement is learned in one of two ways. The first opinion uses a Kal Vachomer – a logical deduction calculating that if the stated thing is true all the more so that which has not been stated would apply. In this manner the Gemara states that if the Torah requires a beracha after eating then all the more that we must recite a blessing before eating. (For the logic of this Kal Vachomer see Berachot 35a.) Rebi counters that one need not use a Kal Vachomer since the requirement for a beracha preceding the eating of bread is explicitly learned from the words "asher natan lach". Rebi read these words not as which he (G-d) has given you, but rather, and you shall bless G-d from when he has given you, namely before eating when the food is in your possession. (See in the Gemara Berachot 48b for two alternate pesukim from which we might learn the requirement for a beracha before eating bread.)

Most Rishonim (commentaries during the period of 1000AD – 1500AD) are of the opinion that the Berayta is not stating that a beracha before eating bread – Hamotzi, is mideorita, rather it is giving the rabbinic decree of reciting a beracha some connection to the pesukim of the Torah. The Rashba on the other hand, understands that these Tanaim are of the opinion that the beracha before eating bread-Hamotzi, is mideorita. Yet, the Rashba agrees that we do not rule like these Tanaim but rather we accept the opinion found in the Mishna Berachot (20b), stating that the Beracha after eating bread – Birkat Hamazon is mideorita while Hamotzi is miderabanan.

The Gemara (Berachot 21a) teaches us a Halachic principle that in the event of a doubt as to whether a beracha has been recited, if the beracha is Mide'orita then it should be said but if it is miderabanan it should not be said. Accordingly, every one would agree that if a person is unsure if he or she has recited a Birkat Hamazon they must recite it at this time. (If it is within the allotted time to recite a Birkat Hamazon – approximately seventy-two minutes after concluding ones meal.)

If one is unsure, if he or she has recited a Birkat Hamotzi, and plans to eat more bread, according to most Poskim, all Tanaim would agree that the beracha should not be recited. In the opinion of the Rashba, those Tanaim who are of the opinion that Hamotzi is Mide'orita would require the beracha to be said in a case of doubt. On the other hand the Tana of the Mishna would rule that the beracha should not be said. Since the Rashba agrees with the other Rishonim that we rule like the Tana of the Mishna, in case of doubt, no Hamotzi should be said. This is also the ruling we find in Shulchan Aruch. (OC 167/8 and OC 184/4) It should be noted that though one may not recite a Birkat Hamotzi if there is someone else intending to eat bread then the first person may resolve his doubt by asking the second to have in mind to include him while reciting the Hamotzi.

In our next article we will discuss what should be done when the question of whether a beracha has already been recited applies to other foods.

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## Covenant & Conversation

Thoughts on the Weekly Parsha from

RABBI DR. JONATHAN SACKS

Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the British Commonwealth

Behar The Chronological Imagination

[From 2 years ago]

I WANT, IN THIS STUDY, to look at one of Judaism's most distinctive and least understood characteristics - the chronological imagination.

The modern world was shaped by four revolutions: the English, the American, the French and the Russian. Two - the English and American - were inspired by the Hebrew Bible which in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, because of the Reformation and the invention of printing, became widely available for the first time. The French and Russian revolutions, by contrast, were inspired by philosophy: the French by the work of Jean Jacques Rousseau, the Russian by the writings of Karl Marx.

Their histories are markedly different. In England and America, revolution brought war, but led to a gradual growth of civil liberties, human rights, representative government and eventually democracy. The French and Russian revolutions began with dreams of utopia and ended in a nightmare of hell. Both gave rise to terror and bloodshed and the repression of human rights.

What is the difference between philosophy and the political vision at the heart of Tenakh? The answer lies in their different understandings of time.

The Sedra of Behar sets out a revolutionary template for a society of justice, freedom and human dignity. At its core is the idea of the Jubilee, whose words ("Proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof") are engraved on one of the great symbols of freedom, the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia. One of its provisions is the release of slaves:

If your brother becomes impoverished and is sold to you, do not work him like a slave. He shall be with you like an employee or a resident. He shall serve you only until the jubilee year and then he and his children shall be free to leave you and return to their family and to the hereditary land of their ancestors. For they are My servants whom I brought out of the land of Egypt; they shall not be sold as slaves. Do not subjugate them through hard labour - you shall fear your G-d . . . For the children of Israel are servants to Me: they are My servants whom I brought out of the land of Egypt - I am the Lord your G-d.

The terms of the passage are clear. Slavery is wrong. It is an assault on the human condition. To be "in the image of G-d" is to be summoned to a life of freedom. The very idea of the sovereignty of G-d means that He alone has claim to the service of mankind. Those who are G-d's servants may not be slaves to anyone else.

At this distance of time it is hard to recapture the radicalism of this idea, overturning as it did the very foundations of religion in ancient times. The early civilizations - Mesopotamia, Egypt - were based on hierarchies of power which were seen to inhere in the very nature of the cosmos. Just as there were (so it was believed) ranks and gradations among the heavenly bodies, so there were on earth. The great religious rituals and monuments were designed to mirror and endorse these hierarchies. In this respect Karl Marx was right. Religion in antiquity was the robe of sanctity concealing the naked brutality of power. It canonized the status quo.

At the heart of Israel was an idea almost unthinkable to the ancient mind: that G-d intervenes in history to liberate slaves - that the supreme Power is on the side of the powerless. It is no accident that Israel was born as a nation under conditions of slavery. It has carried throughout history the memory of those years - the bread of affliction and the bitter herbs of servitude - because the people of Israel serves as an eternal reminder to itself and the world of the moral necessity of liberty and the vigilance

needed to protect it. The free G-d desires the free worship of free human beings.

Yet the Torah does not abolish slavery. That is the paradox at the heart of Behar. To be sure it was limited and humanized. Every seventh day, slaves were granted rest and a taste of freedom. In the seventh year Israelite slaves were set free. If they chose otherwise they were released in the Jubilee year. During their years of service they were to be treated like employees. They were not to be subjected to back-breaking or spirit-crushing labour. Everything dehumanizing about slavery was forbidden. Yet slavery itself was not banned. Why not? If it was wrong, it should have been annulled. Why did the Torah allow a fundamentally flawed institution to continue?

It was Moses Maimonides in *The Guide for the Perplexed* who explained the need for time in social transformation. All processes in nature, he argued, are gradual. The foetus develops slowly in the womb. Stage by stage a child becomes mature. And what applies to individuals applies to nations and civilizations:

It is impossible to go suddenly from one extreme to the other. It is therefore, according to the nature of man, impossible for him suddenly to discontinue everything to which he has been accustomed.

Accordingly, G-d did not ask of the Israelites that they suddenly abandon everything they had become used to in Egypt. "G-d refrained from prescribing what the people by their natural disposition would be incapable of obeying." But surely G-d can do anything, including changing human nature. Why then did He not simply transform the Israelites, making them capable immediately of the highest virtue? Maimonides' answer is simple:

I do not say this because I believe that it is difficult for G-d to change the nature of every individual person. On the contrary, it is possible and it is in His power . . . but it has never been His will to do it, and it never will be. If it were part of His will to change the nature of any person, the mission of the prophets and the giving of the Torah would have been superfluous.

In miracles, G-d changes nature but never human nature. Were He to do so, the entire project of the Torah - the free worship of free human beings - would have been rendered null and void. There is no greatness in programming a million computers to obey instructions. G-d's greatness lay in taking the risk of creating a being, homo sapiens, capable of choice and responsibility - of obeying G-d freely.

G-d wanted mankind to abolish slavery but by their own choice, and that takes time. Ancient economies were dependent on slavery. The particular form dealt with in Behar (slavery through poverty) was the functional equivalent of what is today called "workfare", i.e. welfare benefit in return for work. Slavery as such was not abolished in Britain and America until the nineteenth century, and in America not without a civil war. The challenge to which Torah legislation was an answer is: how can one create a social structure in which, of their own accord, people will eventually come to see slavery as wrong and freely choose to abandon it? The answer lay in a single deft stroke: to change slavery from an ontological condition ("what am I?") to a temporary circumstance. No Israelite was allowed to be or see himself as a slave. He or she might be reduced to slavery for a period of time, but this was a passing plight, not an identity. Compare the account given by Aristotle:

By analogy, [the difference between animals and human beings] must necessarily apply to mankind as a whole. Therefore all men who differ from one another by as much as the soul differs from the body or man from a wild beast . . . these people are slaves by nature, and it is better for them to be subject to this kind of control, as it is better for the other creatures I have mentioned [i.e. domesticated animals]. For a man who is able to belong to another person is by nature a slave . . . (Politics 1.5)

For Aristotle, slavery is an ontological condition, a fact of birth. Some are born to rule, others to be ruled. This is precisely the worldview to which Torah is opposed. The entire complex of biblical legislation is

designed to ensure that neither the slave nor his owner should ever see slavery as a permanent condition. A slave should be treated "like an employee or a resident," in other words, with the respect due to a free human being. In this way the Torah ensured that, although slavery could not be abolished overnight, it would eventually be. And so it happened.

There are profound differences between philosophy and Judaism, and one lies in their respective understandings of time. For Plato and his heirs, philosophy is about the truth that is timeless (or for Hegel and Marx, about "historical inevitability"). Judaism is about truths (like human freedom) that are realized in and through time. That is the difference between what I call the logical and chronological imaginations. The logical imagination yields truth as system. The chronological imagination yields truth as story (a story is a sequence of events extended through time). Revolutions based on philosophical systems fail - because change in human affairs takes time, and philosophy is incapable of understanding the human dimension of time. The inevitable result is that (in Rousseau's famous phrase) they "force men to be free" - a contradiction in terms, and the reality of life under Soviet Communism. Revolutions based on Tenakh succeed, because they go with the grain of human nature, recognizing that it takes time for people to change. The Torah did not abolish slavery but it set in motion a process that would lead people to come of their own accord to the conclusion that it was wrong. How it did so is one of the wonders of history.

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From: weekly-halacha-owner@torah.org on behalf of Jeffrey Gross [jgross@torah.org] Sent: Wednesday, May 18, 2005 7:06 PM To: weekly-halacha@torah.org Subject: Weekly Halacha - Parshas Behar WEEKLY-HALACHA FOR 5765

By RABBI DONIEL NEUSTADT Rav of Young Israel in Cleveland Heights  
A discussion of Halachic topics. For final rulings, consult your Rav SHE'AILOS U'TESHUVOS

QUESTION: Is a berachah rishonah required when tasting food?

DISCUSSION: A berachah is required only when food is swallowed; if the food is merely tasted but not swallowed, no berachah is said. Thus one who tastes a food to determine whether or not it needs spices or other ingredients but does not swallow it, does not recite a berachah.(1) But even if one intends to swallow the food that he samples a berachah is still not recited, since many Rishonim are of the opinion that only food eaten for enjoyment requires a berachah, not food which is being tested for palatability.(2) In order to avoid a questionable situation, one should recite a berachah rishonah only in the following manner.(3) Either:

\* Taste and swallow at least 3 oz. of liquid or 1 oz. of solid food;(4) or \* Swallow the food with the dual intention of tasting and enjoying it;(5) or \* Recite a berachah over a different food that requires that same berachah. [Chewing gum requires a she'hakol,(6) since one swallows the gum's sugar or artificial sweetener. A berachah acharonah, however, is not recited since the minimum amount required for a berachah acharonah is not consumed.] The same halachah applies regarding smelling something to determine whether or not it has a pleasant fragrance. The required berachah over fragrances is not recited, since the intention of the smelling is not for enjoyment but rather for testing the quality of the fragrance.(7)

QUESTION Are there any mourning restrictions on a child, sibling or spouse of someone who is sitting shivah?

DISCUSSION: In Chazal's times, a child or a sibling of a mourner sat shivah along with him, which meant that all of the restrictions that were placed on the mourner were followed by his child or sibling as well. Although today we longer conduct ourselves in this manner, it is still customary in many communities that siblings, children and spouses(8) participate in some limited way with the mourners.(9) Since this custom was not universally accepted,(10) one should consult his rav to determine his community's custom. Even among communities that practice this custom, there are varying degrees as to what is restricted. It is, however, generally accepted that one does not attend weddings or eat any other meals outside of his home including a seudas mitzvah of any type or meals which are social get-togethers.(11) Also, one should avoid taking a hot bath or shower.(12) [Others are even more stringent: Relatives do not change their clothes (except for Shabbos), take a haircut, shave or cut their nails.(13)] The poskim debate whether or not restrictions on relatives apply when the mourner is sitting shivah in

another city.(14) All of these restrictions are in effect only from the day of the burial through the end of that week; once Motzaei Shabbos arrives these restrictions are lifted, even if the shivah began on Friday.(15)

QUESTION May one who does not use the city eiruv [for carrying on Shabbos] ask another person who does use the eiruv to carry on his behalf?

DISCUSSION: The answer will depend upon the reason why the first person does not make use of the eiruv. If, in his opinion or in the opinion of his halachic authority, the eiruv is not valid and may not be used at all, then he may not ask another person to carry for him either. This is because he is asking the other person to do something which is not halachically permitted. But if, in his opinion or in the opinion of his halachic authority, the eiruv is valid, yet he chooses to be stringent and not use the eiruv, it is permitted to ask another person to carry on his behalf. In this case, the other person is not performing an halachically forbidden action.

The same principle applies in other areas of halachah. For example: Contemporary poskim disagree whether or not it is permitted to lift off the tab of a soda or a beer can on Shabbos.(16) One who does not remove tabs because he adheres to the halachic opinion that forbids it, may not ask another person to open a can on his behalf. If, however, it is only a personal stringency but in theory he agrees that it is permissible, he is allowed to ask another person who opens soda cans to open one for him as well. May a person who keeps Shabbos until 72 minutes past sunset ask another person who waits less than 72 minutes to perform a forbidden Shabbos "Labor" for him before 72 minutes are up? Again, it will depend on the previously mentioned principle. If waiting 72 minutes is based on a strict halachic interpretation, then asking someone else to do a forbidden Labor is like asking him to be mechalel Shabbos. If, however, keeping 72 minutes is a personal stringency or a family custom, it is permitted to ask another person who does not have this stringency or custom to "transgress" Shabbos on your behalf.(17)

FOOTNOTES: 1 O.C. 210:2. 2 Mishnah Berurah 210:19; Igros Moshe O.C. 1:79. 3 If none of the following options is practical, one should not recite a berachah even though he is going to swallow the food which he is tasting. 4 Mishnah Berurah 210:14; Igros Moshe O.C. 1:80. 5 Igros Moshe O.C. 1:79, based on Chayei Adam 49:5. 6 Based on Igros Moshe O.C. 2:57. 7 V'zot ha-Berachah, pg. 324, quoting oral rulings from Harav M. Feinstein and Harav C.P. Scheinberg. 8 Spouses participate in mourning only when the deceased is either their father-in-law or their mother-in-law; see Gesher ha-Chayim 19:5-3. 9 This custom is recorded by the Rishonim and quoted by the Rama Y.D. 374:4 and by almost all of the latter poskim, including the Chochmas Adam 161:5, Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 203:2 and Gesher ha-Chayim 19:3-5, as common practice. 10 Knesses ha-Gedolah Y.D. 374 writes that this custom was not practiced in his area at all. See also Aruch ha-Shulchan 374:16 who remarks that "some" are not careful about these restrictions. Harav M. Feinstein is quoted as orally ruling that it is not the custom nowadays. Sefaradim, too, do not practice this custom; Yalkut Yosef, Aveilus, 8:2). 11 Taz Y.D. 374:2 and Shach 7. 12 On Erev Shabbos, however, it is permitted to take a hot shower; Da'as Kedoshim Y.D. 374. 13 See the various views in Divrei Sofrim 374:54 and Eimek Davar 72. 14 See Pischei Teshuvah Y.D. 374:4 and Gesher ha-Chayim 19:5-3. Harav S.Z. Auerbach (Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 65, note 80) tended to rule leniently on this issue. See also Orchos Rabbeinu, vol.4, pg. 116. 15 Rama Y.D. 374:4 and Shach 7. 16 See The Weekly Halachah Discussion, vol. 1, pg. 137. 17 Entire discussion based on the following sources: Darkei Teshuvah Y.D. 119:58 quoting Ksav Sofer; Igros Moshe O.C. 1:186; Harav S.Z. Auerbach (Peninei ha-Maor, letter 3-8 and letter 22-1; Shulchan Shelomo 318:57 and footnote); Shevet ha-Levi:53.

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From: RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN's Shabbat Shalom Parsha Column [Shabbat\_Shalom@ohrtorahstone.org.il] on behalf of Rabbi Shlomo Riskin's Shabbat Shalom Parsha Column [parshat\_hashavua@ohrtorahstone.org.il] Sent: Wednesday, May 18, 2005 6:46 AM To: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin's Shabbat Shalom Parsha

Column Subject: Shabbat Shalom: Parshat Behar by Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

Shabbat Shalom: Parshat Behar (Leviticus 25:1-26:2) By Shlomo Riskin Efrat, Israel - "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.... you shall sanctify the fiftieth year and proclaim freedom throughout the land for all its inhabitants.... it shall be a Jubilee year for you...." (Leviticus 25:8-13)

The Biblical portions in the Book of Leviticus – Tazria, Metzorah, Emor and Behar – seem to be almost fixated on the commandment to count, the commandment of sefirah. 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 33:15,16); 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 week's 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. Similarly, 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 of slavery to our entry into Israel and Jerusalem. 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 obviously were to be brought to the Holy Temple in Jerusalem (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 Haggadah during the Passover Seder. The Mishnah (in Arvei Pesachim) 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 Haggadah neglects to include the last two verses of the declaration of the one who brings the first fruits. The Haggadah quotes: "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 G-d who heard our voice, saw our affliction, and took us out of Egypt with a strong hand... with signs and with wonders." (Deut. 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 G-d 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 G-d 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 is 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 G-d . 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 from 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 spr also means to tell, to recount, to clarify – which is the real commandment of the Seder night of sipur yetziat mitzraim . The same root spr 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." (Exodus 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 G-d – 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.

Shabbat Shalom

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From: Shema Yisrael Torah Network [shemalist@shemaisrael.com] Sent: May 19, 2005 To: Peninim Parsha Behar  
PENINIM ON THE TORAH BY  
RABBI A. LEIB SCHEINBAUM

Hashem spoke to Moshe on Har Sinai saying... When you come into the land which I give you, then shall the land keep a Shabbos unto Hashem. (25:12) The mitzvah of Shemittah, to allow the land to remain fallow for an entire year every seven years, is the only mitzvah in the Torah that is introduced as having been "given on Har Sinai." While we are certainly aware that all of the mitzvos were given on Har Sinai, the commentators give reasons that the Torah emphasizes the mitzvah of Shemittah. Let it suffice to assert that this is a mitzvah of great significance. Indeed, later on (in 26:24-35), the Torah warns that if exile occurs, it will be the result of our failure to observe the laws of Shemittah. Why does this mitzvah have such overriding significance?

Two aspects to Shemittah observance are unique. An element of mesiras nefesh, self-sacrifice, is built into the mitzvah. Each individual, as well as the nation collectively, must refrain from working the land - an action that could affect the economy of the entire nation. Also, bitachon, faith and trust, is reflected in the belief that Hashem will compensate the people for their sacrifice when the Divine blessing results in an overabundance of crops. Thus, Shemittah serves as the paradigm of a mitzvah that apparently demands a sacrifice, while simultaneously, assures the respondent that he will not suffer as a result.

When we peruse Jewish history, we note an interesting phenomenon. The Divine promise was fulfilled when the people inhabited Eretz Yisrael and kept the mitzvah of Shemittah. Hashem also meted out Divine retribution when they discontinued their observance. The glaring question that confronts us is: What happened? Why did they violate the Shemittah when they clearly saw that it was working? Their land produced threefold in order to defray any loss incurred by the Shemittah. The Torah warned against this attitude and the warning, regrettably, came true. Why was Klal Yisrael so foolish to risk everything, especially when they saw Divine results? Why did they seek punishment when they were reaping rewards?

Rabbi Abraham Twersky uses this incident to support a psychological theory that considers this a weakness of human nature. There is often a compulsive urge to see whether we can "get away with it," despite the fact that this action is contraindicated by logic. In other words, we act foolishly because we have this urge

to "see" if we can do it and go unpunished. How often do we find people who have successfully overcome addiction and other dependencies for a number of years only to succumb once again to their craving? Why? They think that they can get away with it. What could be so bad if "one" time they would give in to their craving? That one time is usually the beginning of their end.

For many years our ancestors observed Shemittah and received the wonderful blessings that are intrinsic to this mitzvah. Then they thought they could "have their cake and eat it too." They sought to use the additional income that they received in their sixth year and to continue working the land during the seventh year. They were wrong. Divine blessing is not negotiable. If one observes Shemittah, he is blessed. If he does not observe Shemittah, he will lose Eretz Yisrael. This phenomenon has clearly been demonstrated in the observance of the mitzvah of Shemittah. Hence, this mitzvah serves as the prototype for all mitzvos that Hashem gave at Har Sinai. The rule that is indicated through Shemittah stands true for all mitzvos.

Each of you shall not aggrieve his fellow. (25:17)

Onoas devarim, hurting people with words in personal relationships, embarrassing them by calling attention to their past indiscretions or questionable ancestry, rendering bad advice to the unknowing and unassuming, are acts that are deplorable for which Hashem metes out punishment. Included in onoas devarim is the sin of using people, cheating them in business, even if no real monetary loss ensues. An example is when one visits a merchant under the pretense that he wants to purchase one of his wares, when, in truth, he only wants to check out the price. He wastes the merchant's time and raises his hopes, all for nothing. Referring to a person or to a group by a derogatory nickname is onoas devarim. This attitude has been one of the primary catalysts of a number of unfortunate incidents that have occurred to the general Jewish community throughout history.

There are people who feel that with a little shtoch, a sharp word, they might encourage a person to repent. Indeed, a piercing comment has the power to generate a reaction when simple talking has failed. What we do not realize is that these well-meaning shtochs hurt people, and, rather than create a positive response, the reaction might be of a negative nature. It all depends on one's true purpose: If it is solely to create a positive reaction, it might be permitted, but who really knows their innermost feelings, and who is so sure that the positive results overwhelm the negative feelings generated by a hurtful comment?

Chazal teach us that descendants of Haman studied Torah in Bnei Brak. It seems like a fairly incongruous reward. What merit did the wicked Haman have that gave him such nachas, spiritual pleasure? Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita, cites the Dubno Maggid, zl, who gives the following parable as explanation for Haman's reward: The prince of a region was eating, when suddenly a sharp bone became stuck in his throat. A robber who had intended to kidnap the prince and later kill him after he collected a hefty ransom, unknowingly grabbed hold of the prince as he was choking. The various movements needed to compromise the prince caused the bone to come loose. Inadvertently, the robber had saved the prince's life. The kidnap was foiled, and the robber was apprehended. Now it was up to the king to decide the robber's fate. On the one hand, he sought to kill the prince. On the other hand, he did save his life. The king decided to punish the robber for his intended actions and to reward his children for the positive results.

A parallel applies to the evil Haman. His intentions were certainly evil. He sought to destroy the Jewish People and erase them from the face of the earth. His actions, however, catalyzed their repentance and return to the Almighty. For his nefarious actions he was required to pay, but his descendants were the recipients of a great reward because of the positive reaction that he had inadvertently generated within Klal Yisrael.

Rav Zilberstein cites another interesting question. A young man, who clearly did not take care of his health, visited the doctor complaining of difficulty in breathing. The physician diagnosed a simple lung ailment that would respond to therapy - if it were followed properly. Aware of the young man's careless attitude concerning his health, the doctor decided to scare him and instead delivered a crushing diagnosis: he was ill with a dread disease that would certainly kill him unless he took immediate action. The young man took no chances, and overnight he altered his lifestyle. The question that was posed to the rav: Did the physician act appropriately? Does the end result justify the means?

At first glance, Rav Zilberstein posits that the physician had acted inappropriately, since he caused the young man to worry needlessly. He cites the incident between Peninah and Chanah, Shmuel HaNavi's mother, to substantiate his thesis. Peninah caused Chanah enormous grief when she called attention to the many children she had, each time alluding to Chanah's childlessness. As a result of Chanah's grief, Peninah lost seven children. Peninah's motivation was positive, seeking to galvanize Chanah's resolve to daven with greater intensity and fervor, so that her

tefillos, prayers, would pierce the Heavens and reach the Heavenly Throne. She, nonetheless, was guilty of causing her co-wife extreme emotional pain. Why should the physician who misled his patient be any different?

Afterwards, Rav Zilberstein opines that the validity of such behavior is determined by the individual's personal suffering. If the subject of one's hurtful words stands to benefit personally as a result of the remarks it might be permissible. Thus, in the case of the young man, the doctor's actions might have been justifiable. Peninah, however, had no reason to act the way she did, since Chanah was not in any danger.

Playing with another Jew's emotions is similar to playing with fire: one gets hurt. The best way to sensitize ourselves to this danger is to circumvent it, by doing everything to think and act positively with regard to our fellow Jew. Share another Jew's burden, think of his plight; be sensitive to his needs: that is the way a Jew is supposed to act. Rabbi Yissachar Frand relates a powerful incident in the life of Horav Moshe Feinstein, zl, one that aptly characterizes this venerable sage. It was in 1970, when two plane loads of Jews were hijacked. Among the victims was Horav Yitzchak Hutner, zl, and a group of his students. There were Tehillim and tefillah rallies throughout the Jewish world supplicating Hashem for their safe return. The joy and relief when they were released was felt by all, and an enormous welcome gathering was arranged in Kennedy Airport to greet them upon their arrival. Thousands of Jews sang and danced to the music of a band hired specifically for the event.

The gadol hador, preeminent Torah leader of the generation, was also in attendance at the airport. As he entered the airport, an interesting phenomenon occurred. His face became clouded, and he walked over to the band and asked them to cease performing. He did this because the fate of six of the hostages was as yet undetermined. How could music be played if their lives were still in danger, if their families were still sick with worry concerning their fate? It is certainly incumbent upon everyone to celebrate the safe return of Rav Hutner, but it could be done without music, out of deference to the feelings of the other families who were not as fortunate. This was Rav Moshe! This was only one aspect of his gadlus, distinction.

Our obligation extends further: we must feel their pain. Horav Avraham Pam, zl, once visited a young couple who were sitting shivah, observing the seven-day mourning period, for the loss of their young son. There were no words of consolation to express to the bereaved parents. What could one say? How could one penetrate their grief to reach them? Rav Pam said nothing. He just sat down and cried - and cried. For twenty minutes, his tears flowed freely. He then rose and wished the couple the traditional words of consolation and left. A short time later, these people commented to a friend that Rav Pam had comforted them more so than anyone else. Why? What did he do? He really had said nothing, but he cried. He empathized with them. He conveyed to them a powerful message: You are not alone. Others care and share in your sorrow and grief.

When we demonstrate our concern for others, we sensitize ourselves to the point that negative feelings or comments are not consistent with our character.

If your brother becomes impoverished and his means falter in your proximity, you shall strengthen him. (25:35)

Do not wait until your fellow Jew falls under the pressure of financial constraints. Help him before he reaches the poverty level. It is much easier for one who has not yet descended to the pit of despair to arise from it, than it is for one who has lost his financial footing completely, who has bottomed out, to emerge from his predicament. Horav S.R. Hirsch, zl, notes that the word mote (u'matah yado, "and his means falter") to totter, to falter, to be about to fall, does not occur elsewhere in connection with the word yad, hand (yado), but only with regel, foot (the general condition of the individual). Were it to say u'mato raglo in reference to his general condition, it would designate a circumstance where the situation is such that his existence is already threatened, and the assistance which he needs is life-sustaining. The phrase u'mato yado describes his "hand" as becoming shaky; it is only his activity - not his existence - that is in peril. His means for actively gaining and earning a livelihood have begun to fail. Assistance at this point would enable him to continue independently earning his living. Help him before he falls completely, for then it will be very difficult to raise him back up.

This endeavor must be made imach, with you. In offering and lending assistance, do not reduce him to a condition of sloth and loss of self-respect. He is to be supported - with you - next to you. You must assist him in such a manner that he does not sink below you in morale.

In the Talmud Bava Basra 9b, Chazal say that one who gives a poor man money will be blessed with six blessings. One who appeases and comforts him receives eleven blessings. What is the reason for this? Horav Yisrael Yaakov Lubchenski, zl, the venerable mashgiach of Baranowitz, explains that there is no comparison

between he who relinquishes his money and he who gives up his precious time for another Jew. Time is more than just money; it is life itself. It should be viewed as a man's most precious possession. One who achieves the high spiritual plateau of chesed, kindness, in which he is willing to give up his time for a poor man, to console him and give him succor in his time of need, demonstrates by his actions that tzedakah, the mitzvah of charity, has great meaning and value for him. Anyone who abnegates his greatest asset for his fellow Jew deserves all of Hashem's blessings.

A good word, a caring remark at the right time can make the difference in a person's day and even life. There are people who are in need of financial support and there are those who beg for emotional support. They need a bit of praise, some encouragement - even a simple smile. Yes, that is also tzedakah. Horav Simchah Bunim Alter, zl, the Gerer Rebbe, was a practical person whose name became a byword as a champion for Torah interests in Eretz Yisrael. His initiative set standards of restraints on simchos and marrying off children. He was revered and loved by Jews of all stripes. He was a loving and caring father, as well as an uplifting mentor to thousands. He had a kind word for everyone. Shortly after he became Rebbe, a young boy came to him grieving. "I have been left bereft of my parents," he cried.

"I will be your father and mother," the Rebbe replied. Although this boy had a number of married brothers, the Rebbe took him into his house, eating meals with him and concerning himself with all of his needs, and finally leading him to the chupah as his own grandchild. He was just one of the many orphans the Rebbe adopted over the years.

The Rebbe's concern for the needs of Klal Yisrael was exemplary. He would often cite the Rebbe, Reb Bunim, zl, of Peshischa, who made the following comment concerning the structure of Shema Yisrael. The second section of shema (V'hayah im shamo) which is written in the plural does not mention "to love G-d... with all your possessions," as the first section does, because when taken on the public level, economic issues become matters of life and death, and these have already been included in "with all your lives." The Rebbe added that added financial constraints prevent one from focusing on his service to Hashem.

To this end, the Rebbe looked into various ways to ease the economic plight of his chassidim - and others as well. He offered suggestions that, in effect, left an imprint on all sectors of Israeli society in different ways. He was accessible to all, because he cared about all of them. I think the following vignette sums up his essence and conveys to us what our relationship with our fellow Jew should be.

When the Rebbe married off his first grandchild, the chassidim asked whether they should wear their shtraimels (a practice usually reserved for close family) at the wedding. The Rebbe told them to ask an elderly chasid who had lived in Gur. The man recalled that those who were close to the Rebbe would wear their shtraimels. When the Rebbe heard this account, he said, "Everyone is close to me."

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