

Weekly Internet Parsha Sheet BEHAR 5782

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Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

This week's portion creates an eternal connection between Mount Sinai, the Jewish people, and the Torah itself. The fact that the Torah emphasizes its eternal association with Mount Sinai is meant to teach us important lessons regarding Judaism and Jewish life.

There are grand and majestic mountains that dot our planet. They are awe-inspiring in their height and strength, and they tower over us, making us feel puny and insignificant when standing at their base. I remember that when I was able to visit Mount McKinley in Alaska, a mountain which rises vertically more than 20,000 feet above the plane from which it emanates, the feeling of tension was so overpowering that people in our tour group burst into tears. The mountain blocks out the sun and creates its own weather.

However, the Torah was not given to human beings on Mount McKinley or Mount Everest or any of the other great mastiffs that exist in our world. Midrash teaches us that Mount Sinai was and is a relatively low mountain. The rabbis derived from this the emphasis on and the requirements of humility. Arrogance and godly values do not coexist. So, even though Mount Sinai is a mountain, it is a low mountain, one that can be scaled and conquered. And the achievement of climbing that mountain will not produce fanfare or notoriety.

If the Torah had been granted on Mount Everest it would be unreachable for almost all human beings. It was given on Mount Sinai, to emphasize that it is accessible to all, and that even though it is a mountain, it is one that can and must be scaled, to achieve the eternity that it promises human beings.

From the top of a mountain, one has a majestic view of the surrounding area. A mountain peak provides us with perspective, and the ability to judge the world from an overview as an observer, even though we are participants. Without that overview, is very difficult to make sense of life, or to have any personal sense of serenity or peace.

The prophet tells us that the wicked are like the raging sea whose waves constantly batter the shoreline but are always limited. Mountains, when appreciated, give us the blessings of unique wisdom, patience, and a sense of optimism and hope in our lives, no matter how bleak events may be, or how worrisome situations are.

Our father Abraham founded the Jewish people and brought "godliness" down to our earth. He saw that measure of godliness as being in the form of a mountain. His son, Isaac, would modify it so that it would become like a field. And his grandson Jacob would see it as being a house. But all of these characteristics still remain within Judaism. Mount Sinai exemplifies the mountain that Abraham saw.

Life is never an easy climb, but climb it we must, to be able to stand at its peak, and truly observe life in society in a measured and wise way.

Shabbat shalom

Rabbi Berel Wein

Covenant & Conversation

BEHAR - The Economics of Liberty

Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks ZT" L

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

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

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

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

[1] Thomas Picketty, Capital in the Twenty-First Century, translation: Arthur Goldhammer, Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014.

[2] <http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2012/12/a-giant-statistical-round-up-of-the-income-inequality-crisis-in-16-charts/266074>.

[3]

<http://www.theguardian.com/business/2014/jan/20/oxfam-85-richest-people-half-of-the-world>.

[4] Isaiah Berlin, ‘Two concepts of liberty,’ in Four Essays on Liberty, Oxford University Press, 1969.

[5] This is the argument set out by Nobel Prize-winning economist Amartya Sen in his book, Development as Freedom, Oxford Paperbacks, 2001.

[6]

See

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Jewish_Nobel_laureates.

Shabbat Shalom: Parshat Behar (Leviticus 25:1-26:2)

Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

in an open society, he may voluntarily increase his period of incarceration- rehabilitation.

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

Shabbat Shalom!

Insights Parshas Behar - Iyar 5782

Yeshiva Beis Moshe Chaim/Talmudic University

Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

This week’s Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Moshe Shlomo ben Tzvi. “May his Neshama have an Aliya!”

Learning for Life

Therefore you shall fulfill my statutes, and keep my judgments, and do them; and you shall dwell securely in the land (25:18).

This week’s parsha delves into great detail regarding the laws of the shemittah sabbatical year. Rashi (25:18) notes that the punishment for not observing shemittah is expulsion from the land of Israel. Rashi goes on to say that the years of the Babylonian exile were a quid pro quo punishment for the seventy shemittah years that Bnei Yisroel did not keep upon entering the land of Israel (in next week’s parsha on verse 26:35 Rashi gives the exact calculation for the 70 years that Bnei Yisroel violated).

One must wonder what is it about shemittah that Bnei Yisroel found so difficult to observe? Perhaps they didn’t believe that Hashem would provide for them if they didn’t work their fields? After all, what were they to do if they didn’t have food to sustain themselves and their families during the shemittah year (not to mention the following year as well, before the new crops of the eighth year arrived)?

While it is tempting to hypothesize that the reason was that a farmer relying on a yearly crop to survive may not easily abandon planting his crops for lack of proper trust in Hashem, it is ultimately untenable.

The Torah (25:20) deals with this issue directly: “And if you shall say, ‘What shall we eat the seventh year? Behold we shall not plant nor gather in our produce?’ Then I will command my blessing upon you in the sixth year, and it shall bring forth fruit for three years.”

Rashi (ad loc) explains that Hashem promises to provide for them. Hashem guarantees Bnei Yisroel that the sixth year harvest would provide sustenance for them until the

harvest of the eighth year. In other words, Hashem paid Bnei Yisroel three years of sustenance upfront and still they failed to observe the shemittah! This is simply incomprehensible. If they had the food that they needed already in storage after the sixth year, what possible reason could there be for not observing shemittah?

In fact, the question is really much more difficult. Once Bnei Yisroel were paid upfront to not work the shemittah year, how did they have the temerity to accept this payment and then violate the shemittah by working the field anyway? It seems like a terrible flaw of avarice. What compelled them to work the land?

Furthermore, in the beginning of the rebuke of the tochacha in next week’s parsha, Rashi (26:15) points out that all of those terrible outcomes that ultimately led to Bnei Yisroel’s expulsion from the land of Israel was due to the fact that they didn’t labor in their Torah study. If the Torah already explicitly says that they were expelled from the land for not keeping shemittah, what does Rashi mean by saying it was because they didn’t labor in the study of Torah?

We find a possuk (Iyov 5:7) that describes the very essence of man: “Man was born to labor [...].” According to Rashi (ad loc) the context of this verse is the challenge mankind faces in contradistinction to angels who don’t sin. That is to say that while angels do not sin they also do not have potential for personal growth. On the other hand, man is given the potential to achieve, but this also enables him to falter and sin.

Thus, the very essence of man is driven by a desire to accomplish, which defines much of his existence. In fact, many men who retire from work and choose to lead a purposeless life (aside from driving their wives crazy) begin to emotionally and physically deteriorate quite rapidly – often leading to an earlier demise.

This drive to achieve is why Bnei Yisroel weren’t able to observe the shemittah; they simply felt horrible about being inactive and having nothing to do. They chose to violate the mitzvah of shemittah because without work and labor, without a purpose, they felt that they risked their mental and physical well-being. It wasn’t about earning more money; it was about self-preservation.

This is why the Torah mandates that during the shemittah year men are supposed to labor in the learning of Torah and mitzvos. We are enjoined to immerse ourselves in growing in Torah – for when we study Torah, with real effort and diligence, we begin to understand ourselves and the world around us. We then continue to grow as people and lead ever more purposeful lives. This is, after all, the reason that Hashem gifted us the Torah; to enable us to lead the most incredible life that He has planned for each and every one of us.

Family Interest

And if your brother has become poor, and his means begin to falter; then you shall strengthen him [...] You shall not lend him your money for interest [...] (25:35-37).

This week's parsha contains the prohibition of lending money with interest to another Jew. Though it is prohibited to charge interest or pay interest to another Jew, the Torah makes it very clear that this only applies to Bnei Yisroel; it is permissible to lend money to non-Jews and charge them interest.

In fact, Maimonides (Yad – Malveh Veloveh 5:1) rules that it is a positive commandment to charge non-Jews interest. This dichotomy in lending practices has often been used as a pretext to attack Jews all over the world during the last two millennia.

In truth, the laws against charging interest and paying interest require a deeper understanding. As an example: Reuven needs money to pay for his daughter's wedding, and he happens to know that his friend Shimon has a lot of money sitting in the bank earning 2% interest. Reuven wants to borrow some of that money but he feels very uncomfortable asking Shimon, especially knowing that Shimon would be losing that 2% interest that the bank is paying him.

Reuven also realizes that he is already asking Shimon for a big favor because he knows that Shimon is taking a bigger financial risk by withdrawing it from the bank and lending it to him. Moreover, by Shimon lending Reuven the money and thereby losing his 2% earned interest, Reuven now feels like a charity case.

In reality, Reuven would MUCH prefer to pay interest so that he isn't uncomfortable asking Shimon for the loan and isn't made to feel like he is receiving charity; so why should Reuven not be allowed to pay interest?

Obviously, the Torah is teaching us that paying interest between two Jews simply isn't appropriate. Why not?

Let's say that a person's mother needed money. Would a healthy person charge their own mother interest? Or their son or brother? Of course not. Functional families are devoted to each other even at a cost. Moreover, a son asking his parents for a loan doesn't feel like he is receiving charity by not paying interest.

The Torah is teaching us that the reason you aren't allowed to charge interest isn't because one should not take advantage of another; the reason is because one Jew is obligated to treat another as family. This is why the Torah characterizes the borrower by saying, "You shall not lend upon interest to your brother; [...] to a stranger you may lend upon interest; but to your brother you shall not lend upon interest" (Shemos 23:20-21).

This also explains why it is not only okay to charge non-Jews interest but actually a mitzvah to do so. We need to internalize that they aren't our family. Obviously, we shouldn't charge exorbitant interest, just something reasonable that they are happy to accept. Non-Jews understand that they aren't family and, in fact, they are

more comfortable asking for a loan with interest because otherwise it would be like receiving charity.

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For the week ending 14 May 2022 / 13 Iyar 5782

Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

www.seasonsofthemoon.com

Parshat Behar

Crop Rotation - "For six years you may sow your field" (25:3)

I still remember learning at school about crop rotation. One year the field would be planted with wheat, the next year with barley or some other crop, and the third it would be left to lie fallow. And then the cycle would begin again.

When reading this week's Torah portion, one could think that the mitzvah of Shemita the prohibition of working the fields in the seventh year is some kind of holy crop rotation. The difference being that in the Torah it says you should work the field for six years and leave it for a seventh.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

First, there is evidence that working a field for six straight years and then leaving it for one year does nothing to improve its yield and may even have a negative effect. Second, the Torah prescribes dire punishments for the non-observance of Shemita. The seventy years of the Babylonian exile were a punishment for seventy non-observed Shemita years during the 430 years that the Jewish People dwelled in the Land of Israel. We know that Hashem's punishment is always measure for measure. If Shemita was a matter of crop husbandry, how is exile an appropriate punishment? What does exile have to do with the cessation of agriculture in the seventh year? Furthermore, from an agricultural point of view, seventy years without husbandry can have had no possible benefit for the land. Seventy years of weeds and neglect in no way contribute to the lands rejuvenation, so how is this punishment an appropriate restitution?

To answer these questions we must examine what causes a person to violate Shemita in the first place.

A great malaise of our own era is the compulsion to overwork. The workaholic defines himself by his job. When you meet someone socially, the question "What are you?" is usually answered by "I am a doctor" or "I am an accountant" or "I am a rabbi."

There is a fundamental mistake here. What we do is not what we are.

In our society we have confused what we do with who we are. The underlying belief revealed here is that the more I work the more I become myself. Violation of the laws of Shemita comes from a belief that the more I work, the

more money will I make, and the more I make, the more I am the master of my own world.

When a person is sent into exile, all the familiar comforting symbols of his success are taken away from him. He realizes that what he does is not who he is. Both his survival and his identity are gifts from Hashem. The insecurity of exile brings a person face to face with his total dependence on Hashem.

It is from the perspective of exile that a person can rebuild his worldview so that he can see that what he does is not who he is.

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Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

Dvar Torah Behar: In business, we're all princes

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Shabbat shalom.

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

Drasha Parshas Behar - Home Free - For All

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

It is probably the most famous Biblical verse in American History. Each year thousands of people come to see its bold raised lettering prominently encircling the rim of the revered icon of our country's independence. Many visitors hardly notice the verse. Instead, their gaze is transfixed upon another, much less divine symbol, that bears the painful message of that sacred verse. But the large crack they come to see has no inherent meaning. It is only the result of the constant resounding of the words that are sacredly enshrined on its oxidized metal. Those words are from this week's portion, "proclaim liberty throughout the land and to all its inhabitants thereof" (Levitcus 25:10).

Truth be told, however, those words refer not to a revolution or liberation, they refer to the mitzvah of Yovel — Jubilee. Every 50 years, all Jewish servants, whether employed for only a six-year period or on an extended docket, and even those who desire to remain as servants to their masters, are freed. They return home to their families, and their careers of indenturage are over.

But the verse is confusing. It says, "proclaim liberty throughout the land and to all its inhabitants thereof." Isn't the Torah referring to the freedom of slaves and the servants. Isn't that a proclamation of freedom for only a select few? Why would the Torah use the words "and to all its inhabitants," when only some of its inhabitants are going free? The masters and employers were never slaves. They are not going free. Or are they?

In the first volume of his prolific Maggid series Rabbi Paysach Krohn relates the following story.

It was a cold and blustery day and Rabbi Isser Zalman Melzer, the dean of the Eitz Chaim Yeshiva in Jerusalem, was returning home from a long day in the Yeshiva. Accompanied by his nephew, Reb Dovid Finkel, who normally walked him home, Rabbi Melzer began to ascend the steps to his Jerusalem apartment. Suddenly, Reb Isser Zalman stopped and retreated down the old staircase as if he had forgotten something. As he reached the street, he began to wander aimlessly back and forth, in thought. His nephew began to question the strange actions of the Torah sage. "Did Reb Isser Zalman forget something?" "Why didn't he enter the home?"

The winds began to blow, and despite the chill Reb Isser Zalman walked back and forth outside his home. About 15 minutes passed and once again, Rabbi Melzer walked slowly up the stairs, waited, and then headed back down.

His nephew could not contain himself, "Please, Rebbe," he pleaded. "What's the matter?" Reb Isser Zalman just shrugged and said, "just wait a few more moments. Please."

"But, uncle, it's getting cold. Please answer me. What are you waiting for?"

Rabbi Melzer realized that he could no longer keep his motivations to himself. "I'll explain. As I walked up the steps I heard the young woman who comes once a week to help with the housework in the kitchen. She was mopping the floor and singing while she mopped. I knew that if I were to walk in she would have become embarrassed and stopped her singing. The singing helps her through her work, and I did not want to make her work any bit harder, let alone deny her the joy of her singing. Despite the cold, I decided to wait outside until she finishes her work and her song. Then I'll go in."

The Torah uses a very significant expression this week that synopsizes the true meaning of ownership and servitude. "Proclaim liberty throughout the land and to all its inhabitants thereof." When one employs he is also indebted to his employee. In addition to the paycheck he is responsible for the workers feelings, working conditions and welfare. He is responsible to provide a safe environment, suitable provisions, and above all mentchlechkeit. And when Yovel arrives and the workers and servants return home, they are not the only ones going free. A great burden is lifted from the shoulders of the master. Freedom is declared for all the inhabitants of the land. The servants are not the only ones who are "home free." As we used to say in the heat of the game of ring-o-lee-vio, we are, "home free — all."

Good Shabbos

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Rabbi Yissocher Frand - Parshas Behar

A Time for Belief and a Time for Heresy

This year (5782) is Shemittah in Eretz Yisrael, so the land must lie fallow. The laws of Shmitah are spelled out in Parshas Behar in great detail. There are farmers in Eretz Yisrael who observe this mitzvah meticulously every seven years. It is a great mitzvah to support them financially during this time, to help compensate them for their loss of income. After the mitzvah of Shemittah, Parshas Behar moves on to the mitzvah of Yovel. After seven cycles of seven years, there is a Mitzvas haYovel on the fiftieth year. Right after these agricultural laws, the Torah speaks about a person who falls on hard times (*Ki Yamuch Achicha...*) and how we must treat him. The Gemara [Erchin 30b] comments on the juxtaposition of these two parshiyos—the parsha of Shemittah-Yovel and the parsha of helping an impoverished brother: "Come and see how harsh is the 'dust of the Shemittah' prohibition. For if a man does business with produce of the Shemittah year, hoping to profit thereby, in the end poverty will force him to sell his movable property." The Gemara goes through stage by

stage. First, he needs to sell his movable property, then he needs to sell his land, then he needs to sell this and that. Finally, he becomes so poor that he needs to sell his daughter and himself into slavery as well. This all came about, says the Gemara, because he illicitly tried to make a fortune selling fruits of the Shemittah year (which are supposed to be hefker – ownerless).

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

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

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

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

(I will mention as an historical aside, in the not-too-distant Jewish history there was something known as the 'Haskalah movement'. These were people who felt that parts of the Jewish religion were superstitious and outdated. They felt it was necessary to practice religion "with sechel". That's why the movement was called "the Haskalah.")

To answer this question—why the pasuk uses the expression 'maskil el dal'—I need to mention a pithy saying from Rav Yisrael Salanter. He used to say that regarding a person's own situation, he must be a Ba'al Bitachon (have unlimited faith in G-d's power of deliverance); however, regarding someone else's situation, he must be a kofer (a heretic – i.e., have the feeling that

Hashem will not help and it is up to me to do something to help this other person).

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

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

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

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

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

Confluence of Events Is the Almighty Speaking to Us

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

I wish to explain this Medrash with a true story.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Mishlei is saying: When the poor person and rich man happen to ‘meet’—this was the action of Hashem.

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

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Yom Kippur of Yovel: A Uniquely Opportune Time

Rabbi Zvi Sobolofsky

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

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

Chazal teach us that when Hashem created the world, the theoretical plan was to create a world following the strict rules of justice. The name of Hashem that appears in the beginning of Sefer Bereishis is “Elokim” which is synonymous with middas ha’din – the attribute of justice. Ultimately, Hashem merged in middas ha’rachamim – the attribute of mercy – and created the world in such a manner because a world built on justice alone cannot endure. The description of creation, therefore, describes Hashem as “Hashem Ha’elokim” – the fusion of middas ha’din and middas ha’rachamim. In the musaf of Rosh Hashanah we say, “Ha’yom haras olam – today marks the creation of the world.” As such, the reenactment of ma’aseh Bereishis begins with a time of justice. Rosh Hashanah is such a day. However, just as the original creation necessitated incorporating mercy and compassion to enable the world to exist, every year we relive that tempering of justice by mercy via our Yom Kippur observance. The very gift of teshuva which is the primary theme of Yom Kippur

emanates from middas ha’rachamim. According to strict justice, there should be no way to rectify a sin. Yet, on the day of mercy, teshuva becomes a possibility.

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

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

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Tangible Breath (Behar)

Ben-Tzion Spitz

A people which is able to say everything becomes able to do everything. - Napoleon Bonaparte

Hebrew is a language with many amorphous words. The same word can have multiple meanings which will vary based on the context or even the interpretation. One of my favorite is the word “Havel.” It is most commonly translated as vanity or futility, as in the opening verse of King Solomon’s Ecclesiastes (Kohelet) “Havel havalim, amar kohelet, havel havalim, hakol havel. – popularly translated as “Vanity of vanities, said Kohelet, vanity of vanities, all is vain.”

However, I was pleasantly surprised to discover that the Chidushei HaRim on Leviticus 25:8 gives a vastly deeper and more significant explanation to what “Havel” may be referring to.

He starts off with a seemingly dichotomous use of the word “Havel” by the sages who state that the world is in existence solely thanks to the “Havel” of the mouths of young students. That begs the question that if “Havel” is vanity or futility, how does such “Havel” maintain the universe? The classic translation of “Havel” in this context is the “speech” of the young students. Somehow something as nebulous as the sounds of Torah which emanate from young children’s mouths are so precious and vital that they give the universe the capacity to exist, that the breath they

use to repeat the Torah they learned is so powerful that the breath in a sense creates reality.

The Chidushei HaRim compares it to God's own "breath" which brought life to Adam and all of existence. He then takes this concept to the mortal plane. Man has the capacity to create and destroy with the breath of his mouth. The words we use have very tangible, real-world consequences. We can build up or tear down people, their identity, their reputation, their livelihood, their opportunities and everything that makes them who they are and gives them life.

In the context of the Torah reading of Behar, a person can decide whether to give instructions regarding keeping the agricultural laws, specifically the Sabbatical and Jubilee years. Proper observance of these laws is what gives the land and those who dwell on it continued existence and blessing. One opinion as to the reason the Jewish people were exiled from the land of Israel millennia ago was exactly because of their failure to keep these laws. That failure revoked their right to exist on the land and led directly to their forceful and violent expulsion.

So, another understanding of the word "Havel" might be "divine breath." Therefore, instead of translating King Solomon's famous phrase as "Vanity of vanities, all is vain," we might read it as "Divine breaths of divine breaths, all is divine breath." It is a fundamental understanding that God is behind everything and responsible for everything, and that we ourselves have the gift of "divine breath" to make a positive impact in His world.

To Yair Maimon of Tekoa, for his bravery, alertness and presence of mind to shoot the terrorist attacking him right outside his home.

Shabbat Shalom

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

Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz

Behar – Faith and Compassion

This week's parasha, Behar, deals mostly with the commandment of shmitta, a commandment that is fulfilled only in the Land of Israel. A farmer works his land and is sustained by it for six years. On the seventh year, like the one we are in now, he is commanded to not cultivate or work the land. Furthermore, the harvest that grows on the seventh year does not belong to the farmer, the owner of the field. Rather:

And [the produce of] the Sabbath of the land shall be yours to eat for you, for your male and female slaves, and for your hired worker and resident who live with you, And all of its produce may be eaten [also] by your domestic animals and by the beasts that are in your land. (Leviticus 25, 6-7)

This is a commandment devoid of economic logic, particularly when we are dealing with an economy based primarily on agriculture, as was common in the world in the times of the Torah. But even if it doesn't seem economically logical, it is spiritually and morally logical.

Why is a farmer called upon to let his land rest? In literature from the Middle Ages, two main reasons for this were given. Maimonides (Rabbi Moses ben Maimon, 12th century, of the greatest thinkers and rabbinic religious authorities in Judaism) explained in his book "The Guide for the Perplexed" that this commandment is among those whose purpose is to have us develop compassion for the weak and needy. In the seventh year, the harvest is divided among those who need it, the owner of the field, a slave, or a stranger. Even wild animals are equal to humans in eating from the field. The harvest is *hefker* – lacking ownership.

In Sefer HaChinuch – a book about the commandments in the Torah written in Spain in the 13th century whose author is not definitively known – a different reason for this commandment is given:

Therefore, He, blessed be He, did command to render ownerless all that the land produces in this year – in addition to resting during it (i.e. during the year) – so that a person will remember that the land which produces fruits for him every year does not produce them by its [own] might and virtue. For there is a Master over it and over its master – and when He wishes, He commands him (i.e. the master of the land) to render them (i.e. the fruit) ownerless. (Sefer HaChinuch, commandment 84)

Are these indeed two different reasons? Is there a disagreement here between commentators? It seems more likely that these are two parts of the same reason. When a person recognizes that ownership of his assets is not complete, and that G-d is the real master over him and his assets, he surrenders the social status that stems from the wealth he's accumulated, and he is capable of recognizing that there isn't actually any difference between him and anyone else, or even between him and a wild animal. He realizes he has no reason to be proud of his property. On the contrary, he is told to share the harvest with others.

Faith in G-d provides man with proportion regarding the concept of ownership. True, for six years society acts naturally, with owners of assets enjoying their property and others less. But once every seven years, man is required to remember who the true owner is. That reminds man that he cannot prevail over others because of property.

As a continuation of this, it is interesting to see later in the parasha, several moral-social directives that stem from this principle; for example, the prohibition to deceive others or be fraudulent in trade; the commandment to lend money to someone needy without collecting interest; the obligation to treat even those forced to sell themselves into slavery – as was customary in the past – with fairness and respect; helping family members financially, and more.

The commandment of shmitta is not only relevant for the seventh year. It is a commandment that wishes to change awareness, to lead a person to the profound understanding that he and others are all worthy of respect and compassion, regardless of their financial status. This is a commandment that teaches us the power of faith in G-d to create a more compassionate and egalitarian society. The impact of this commandment is felt also during the six other years. Even when the person does not share his harvest with others, he will remember that his ownership over the harvest does not bequeath more rights and that others are worthy of compassion, respect, and fair treatment independent of their financial state.

The writer is rabbi of the Western Wall and Holy Sites.

Shema Yisrael Torah Network

Peninim on the Torah - Parashas Behar

פרשת בהר תשפ"ב

**ושבתת הארץ שבת ל' ... שש שנים תזרע שדך ... ובשנה השבעית
שבת שבחון יהיה לארכץ**

**The land shall observe a Shabbos rest for Hashem ...
For six years you may sow your field ... but the seventh
year shall be a complete rest for the land. (25:2,3,4)**

The *parshah* commences with the laws of *Shemittah*, which require fields in *Eretz Yisrael* under Jewish ownership to lie fallow during the seventh (and fiftieth) year of the agricultural cycle. This is not the first time that the Torah introduces us to the laws of *Shemittah*. In *Parashas Mishpatim* (*Shemos* 23:10-12), the Torah teaches us concerning *Shemittah*, “Six years you shall work your field...In the seventh you shall let it rest.” The Torah then adds the laws of *Shabbos* which also revolve around a six-day work schedule, followed by a seventh-day rest period: “Six days shall you do your work, and on the seventh day you shall rest.” *Rashi* wonders why the Torah juxtaposes the laws of *Shabbos* upon *Shemittah*. He explains that the Torah is teaching us that even during the *Shabbos* year/*Shemittah*, the weekly *Shabbos* – which attests to Creation – is not cancelled. One should not think that since the entire (seventh) year is called *Shabbos*, the *Shabbos* – which recalls Creation – does not apply.

On the surface, the laws of *Shabbos* do not contradict those of *Shemittah*. While *Shabbos* prohibitions do include some agricultural related labor, they cover the gamut of creative physical labor. *Shemittah*, however, applies only to agrarian labor, such as seeding, harvesting and a wide variety of agricultural activities – which also apply to *Shabbos*, but are only a minor aspect of the *lamed-tes melachos*, 39 forms of prohibited labor. Furthermore, *Shabbos* desecration carries a much graver punishment than desecration of the *Shemittah* prohibitions. *Shabbos* is more intensely holy than the *Shemittah* year. Why would anyone conjecture that *Shabbos* be rescinded during the *Shemittah* year?

The *Shem MiShmuel* points out that whenever the Torah mentions the laws of *Shabbos*, they are mentioned in the context of the six work days which precede it. The Torah includes many examples of this fact. The Torah seems to be conveying the message that the *Shabbos* rest day needs to be preceded by six work days. The logic that he postulates is practical. In order to appreciate and utilize *Shabbos* for our spiritual benefit, we must sever ourselves from our usual day-to-day activities. We need to establish a contrast between *Shabbos* and the workweek. *Shabbos* transports us into a different, more elevated, realm in which the worries concerning our livelihood and the physical realities of the work week do not exist. Only then can the sanctity of *Shabbos* permeate our minds and lives.

Shabbos is *mei’ein Olam Habba*, a taste of the World-to-Come. *Olam Habba* is far-removed from *Olam Hazeh*, this world, to the point that they are two absolutely different, unrelated entities. In order for one to enter into *Olam Habba*, he must be completely removed from this world. *Olam Hazeh* is physical in nature. By overcoming and transcending the physical influence of this world, we are able to enter into the spiritual sphere of *Olam Habba*. Likewise, *Shabbos*, which is a taste of *Olam Habba*, can be appropriately realized only upon divesting oneself from the six work days. Understandably, the six workdays and *Shabbos* are inextricably bound to one another.

We now understand, explains that *Shem MiShmuel*, why one may consider a remote hypothesis to cancel *Shabbos* during the *Shemittah* year. *Shemittah* is the *Shabbos* of the land just as *Shabbos* is the Jew’s rest day from his workweek. During *Shemittah*, the Torah prohibits most agricultural activities. As such, the work days during this year are incomplete, for only non-agrarian work is permitted. As mentioned previously, in order for the weekly *Shabbos* to achieve spiritual perfection/success, it is critical that it be preceded by six fully productive work days. During the six years prior to *Shemittah*, this can be achieved. In the *Shemittah* year, we encounter a problem, since the work days are deficient. People might consider cancelling *Shabbos* during the *Shemittah*, since it will not achieve its lofty goals. To circumvent this proposal, the Torah juxtaposes *Shemittah* upon *Shabbos*, to teach us that we should observe *Shabbos* fully during the *Shemittah*, just as we have observed it during the previous six years.

My nephew is *Rosh Kollel* and *Rav* of the *Gerrer* community in Dimona (*Eretz Yisrael*). He related the following story to me. This past week he was walking to the *bais hamedrash* when he chanced upon an older gentleman who stopped him and asked, “Do you believe in Hashem?” My nephew replied, “I hope so.” The man immediately countered, “Not as much as I do!” He then proceeded to tell him the following story: “Many years ago, I was not observant. It is not as if I was against Torah and *mitzvos*; they were just not my priority. I had to earn a living, and I was working in construction. *Shabbos* was

part of the work week. Construction did not come to a halt out of deference to *Shabbos*. This went on for some time, until our son became ill. After a number of treatments, his doctors despaired for his life. Everything looked extremely bleak. Our son was admitted to the hospital in Beer Sheva, and his health was deteriorating. That is when I decided that my wife and I should become *Shabbos* observant. We really could not ask for the Almighty's favor if we were refusing to do anything for Him. One morning, the hospital called to tell us that we should come down; the doctor wanted to speak to us. We immediately got in the car and drove to the hospital. As I walked from the parking lot, I screamed out to Hashem, 'I promised to observe *Shabbos*, and I am going to keep to my word. Please save our son!' As I was crying out loud, someone stopped and asked what was wrong, why I was screaming. I told him, 'I am speaking with Hashem, pleading with Him to spare our son. Please do not disturb me.' We arrived in the hospital. Our fears were, *baruch Hashem*, not realized. The doctor said that they had just taken a new set of scans. Everything was negative on the scans. Our son was fine, and we would be able to take him home in a few days. Now you know why I believe in Hashem more than you do. I spoke to Him, and He answered me! Can you top that?"

Does this mean that one who observes *Shabbos* is protected from illness? No. It does, however, mean that one who does not observe the *Shabbos*, one who refuses to attest to Hashem's creating the world and then resting on the seventh day, should feel a sense of hypocrisy concerning asking Hashem for favors.

ספרת ל' שבע שבתות שנים ... וקדשתם את שנות החמשים שנה לא תזרעו ולא תקצרו

You shall count for yourself seven cycles of Sabbatical years ... You shall sanctify the fiftieth year ... You shall not sow, you shall not harvest. (25:8,10,11)

Bitachon means trust. For a Jew, *bitachon* means trust in Hashem, because *ein od Milvado*, no one other than He exists. Without Hashem, nothing is possible; with Hashem, everything is achievable. It is as simple as that. Without the Almighty, we simply cannot function. The *mitzvos* of *Shemittah* and *Yovel* are the "poster" *mitzvos* which underscore the need for *bitachon*. After all, to close up shop for a year – and, during *Yovel*, for two years – demands super human trust in Hashem. One might think that living with *bitachon* is a specific characterization of one's religious observance, as if to say, "He is an observant Jew who has incredible trust in the Almighty." Such a statement implies that one can be observant but not trust in Hashem. Any thinking person understands that this is untrue, because if one does not fully believe with all his heart that *ein od Milvado*, for whom is he performing *mitzvos*?

We have more. *Bitachon* is not simply a supplementary positive attribute. *Bitachon* redefines a person. One who lacks *bitachon* lacks an essential Jewish

quality. *Horav Reuven Hexter (Mashgiach, Modiin Illit)* observes that Eliezer, *eved Avraham Avinu*, was an exceptional student of his master. He was able to quell his *yetzer hora*, evil inclination. He absorbed all of his master's Torah. Indeed, his countenance was similar to that of his master. One would, therefore, assume that if Eliezer sought Yitzchak *Avinu* as a son-in-law, Avraham would readily agree. That is, however, not what happened. Eliezer asked, and Avraham said no. Avraham told Eliezer the bitter truth, "You are a descendant of Canaan, son of Cham ben Noach, whom Noach cursed (because of his malevolent behavior when Noach had imbibed a bit too much). I am blessed (Hashem blessed Avraham and all of his future offspring). *Ein arur midabeik b'baruch*; "One who is accursed cannot unite with one who is blessed." End of story. In other words, Eliezer had it all. As Avraham's *talmid muvhak*, primary student, he represented everything that the Patriarch looked for in a student. He was, however, missing one critical attribute: he was not a *baruch*. The playing field had just changed. Avraham could not unite with an *arur*.

What is the criterion for achieving *baruch* status? Just virtue of birth is not sufficient. One needs to prove himself as a *baruch*. *Rav Hexter, Shlita* quotes the *Navi Yirmiyahu* (17:7), *Baruch ha'geber asher yivtach b'Hashem, v'hayah Hashem miyatcho*, "Blessed is the man who trusts in Hashem, then Hashem will be his security." The *Navi* states clearly that the criterion for achieving *baruch* status is *bitachon*, trust, in Hashem. This implies that one who does not trust in Hashem will not be a *baruch*. Only one who believes with every fiber of his body that *ein od Milvado* is considered blessed. We can have no greater blessing than not having a care in the world, because, once one realizes that everything is up to Hashem, he will stop worrying about the various challenges that he encounters.

Many people claim that they have *bitachon* – and it might even be true. The *Imrei Emes* teaches that when someone contends that he has *bitachon*, complete trust in Hashem, it might mean that he trusts in Hashem because he is simply too lazy or cognitively deficient to give the statement considerable thought. He just echoes what others say. It is easier to say, "We are," than to consider what the statement implies. If we would take the time and make the effort to think about what having *bitachon* means, we would mouth this statement with great trepidation.

We are too preoccupied with being like everyone else that we forget who we are. Without self-identity, one's beliefs, ideals and achievements are not his own. He does not know who he is, because he is imitating someone else. If he seeks credit for what he accomplishes, he should decide who he is. Perhaps the following analogy rendered by *Horav Chanoch Henach, zl, m'Alexander*, will shed some light on this.

Once a fellow suffered from poor memory. He was otherwise an alert, caring and friendly individual. He

just had difficulty remembering the simplest chores and locations. In fact, when he arose in the morning, he could not remember where he had left his clothes the night before. It got so bad that people would refer to him as the “golem,” a sad, but unfortunately accurate, nomenclature.

One night, he decided to write a list indicating where he left each article of clothing, so that in the morning he would not have difficulty locating his things. The next morning, he arose bright and early and immediately proceeded to scan his list. He was so excited to find his shirt, pants, socks and shoes exactly where he had left them the previous night. The list worked like a charm. It was the answer to all his problems. He dressed, put on his tie, jacket and hat and was quite happy with himself until, as he was about to leave, he began to wonder: “I have located everything on the list, but myself. Where am I?”

“So it is with us,” the *Rebbe* concluded. “We are not dissimilar from that *golem*. Where are we?” How easy it is to lose sight of oneself and hide within the identity of someone else. It relieves the pressure of being who we are. We can mouth the right words, walk the walk, and talk the talk, but: who are we?

ולא תונו איש את עמיתו ויראת מאלךך

Each of you shall not aggrieve his fellow, and you shall fear your G-d. (25:17)

The Torah admonishes us concerning *onaas devarim*, which means (in short) using speech that may be hurtful to – or might catalyze negative emotions in – the listener. Evoking memories of someone’s negative, troubling past; attributing the onus of one’s problems to his past sinful behavior; reminding a convert about his prior life as a gentile: these are examples of *onaas devarim*. Clearly, one who acts in such a manner is himself a sick person, and, as such, the prohibition may not deter him from acting inconsiderately of others. Sadly, the only fulfillment in this person’s life is the pain he can engender in others.

We can identify another form of *onaah*: self-hurt. The *Peshischa*, *Horav Bunim*, zl, entered his *bais hamedrash* and observed a group of *chassidim* studying *chassidus* together. He asked them, “*Rabbosai*, who is a *chassid* (how do you define *chassid*)?” One of the *chassidim* piped up, ‘One who acts *lifnim meshuras ha’din*, goes beyond the letter of the law (in *mitzvah* observance).’ The *Rebbe* explained, “True, this was the response I sought. The Torah enjoins us not to aggrieve our fellow. That is the *din* – the letter of the law. *Lifnim meshuras ha’din*, a *chassid* is one who does not aggrieve himself.”

We can cite numerous examples of people who aggrieve themselves, who live with negativity and depression. Emotional security is the product of self-acceptance: realizing who you are and what you are able to achieve. One should self-embrace and believe in himself, so that his self-esteem will not suffer. How often do we set

goals for ourselves, and, at the first sign of difficulty, throw in the towel? Success is the result of perseverance and consistency. If one believes in himself, then no problem will deter him from achieving his goals. At the end of the day, the only form of security that one will enjoy is the one that he gives himself through courage, self-belief, determination and most importantly – faith and trust in Hashem.

ויראת מלאךך והי אחיך עמך

And you shall fear your G-d – and let your brother live with you. (25:36)

Tapuchei Chaim derives from this *pasuk* an important lesson concerning interpersonal relationships. *V’yareisa mei Elokecha*, “And you shall fear your G-d” – How do we know that you truly fear Hashem? What is the barometer, the litmus test, that determines your level of *yiraas Shomayim*? *V’chai achicha imach*, “And let your brother live with you.” If you look and perceive the needs of your fellow/brother, when you show that you believe that life and living is not only about you, but about others as well, this is a sign that you are a *yarei Shomayim*. Otherwise, you have not fulfilled the criterion which would confirm you as G-d-fearing. Only one who has *yiraas Shomayim* will adhere to the *pasuk* of *V’ahavta l’reiacha kamocha*, “Love your fellow as yourself.” One who is not G-d-fearing will not constantly think about his fellow. Without *yiraas Shomayim*, one sees only himself – no one else. Furthermore, *mitzvah* observance does not override one’s responsibility to his fellow. It is incumbent that you must figure out a way to do both. If it is one or the other, then your *yiraas Shomayim* is deficient.

The Belzer *Rebbe*, *Horav Yissachar Dov*, zl, received a *kvitel* (written petition for a blessing) from his son, *Horav Mordechai*, zl (future *Rav* of Bilgoire, Poland), asking that he not be drafted into the army. (Being inducted into the army was both physically and spiritually dangerous.) While reading the *kvitel*, the *Rebbe* emitted a *krechitz*, groan. Seeing this, his *Rebbetzin* immediately asked, “Hundreds of young men have beseeched your blessing. Why is it that when it involves your son, you groan? He should be no different than anyone else you have helped.”

The *Rebbe* replied, “This is not why I groaned. It has nothing to do with our son’s chances of blessing. I groaned because I sensed a greater heartfelt affinity to this *kvitel* than to the others. (He felt that he should love all Jews as he loved his son.)

A short while later, representatives of a nearby community came to the *Rebbe* to petition his blessing. Apparently, the poverty level of their community had become so grave that people were unable to tolerate it. They were emotionally distressed and physically weakened by the hunger and deprivation that prevailed. The *Rebbe* responded to their pleas with a parable. (Apparently, his goal was to convey a message to them.)

A young man studied for years to become a physician. It was grueling work, since he did not have the conveniences available to us today. He mastered the educational aspect and was now ready to employ his book knowledge practically. In order to do this, he required a license to practice medicine. He could obtain the license only after passing a test administered by a world-famous physician who could ask any question accessible to him as one of the most knowledgeable physicians in the country.

Prior to getting into the multifaceted details of medicine, the physician asked the young man how he would treat a wounded man who was bleeding profusely. He replied that he would administer a certain medicine. "What would you do if that medicine were unavailable?" the physician asked. The young man suggested a different medicine that could also stop the bleeding. "Let us say, for argument's sake, that medicine is also inaccessible. What would you then do?" The young hopeful replied, "I would burn a piece of cloth and apply it directly to the wound." "If that, too, were not available – no medicine, no cloth – now what?" the physician asked. The young man replied, "I have never been confronted with such a situation. If I have no medicine and no cloth, I would be hard-pressed to save the patient" was the young man's emphatic reply.

When the physician heard this, he bid the young man "good day" and refused to grant him a medical license. The young man was flabbergasted. What did he do wrong? He had answered every question correctly. He had even answered the last question (he felt) correctly. If he were to have no available cure, what else could he do? He had spent years preparing for this moment. Should one question crush his chances of receiving the coveted medical license?

The physician explained, "If you have neither medicine nor a piece of cloth readily available, the doctor improvises. He does not give up. If you could not locate a piece of cloth, then tear up your suit jacket, your shirt, your pants! To sit there with folded hands and say, 'I have done all there is to do,' is not the way a doctor acts! Obviously, the patient's best interests are not your overriding concern. You have no business becoming a physician."

The Belzer Rebbe looked sternly at the representatives of the community who stood before him, "The reason that your community is stricken with overwhelming poverty is that you have no leaders/people who are willing to tear themselves away for their fellow man. The success of a community is contingent upon the willingness of every member to give of himself for the *klal*, greater community. Only then will you be granted the *siyata diShmaya* Divine assistance.

V'aani Tefillah

וְאַתָּה דַעْ מִתְיַ – V'Atah Hashem, ad masai? And You, Hashem, how long?

"*Hashem Yisborach*, for how long more will You watch my pain and deprivation? When will You put an end

to this? We know that You will remember us, and we are certain that once the Redemption is in place, it will all have been worth it, but when? How much longer do we have to wait?" What is the correct response to David *Hamelech*'s question? Veritably, there is no appropriate response. The mere fact that David *Hamelech* is presenting this "question" to Hashem, is an indication that it is rhetorical. He seeks no answer because the "why" is beyond us. We just want Hashem to "know" that we are waiting. To wait for something means that he has not despaired of its advent. We continue to wait, because we believe with unshakable faith that it will happen. Meanwhile, we are "waiting."

לזכר נשמתו - חיים יששכר בן יהיאל ואדל דוב ז"ל - נפטר י"ג אייר

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Missing the Reading

By Rabbi Yirmiyahu Kaganoff

Question #1: The Missing Speaker

The audience waited patiently for the guest speaker from America who never arrived, notwithstanding that he had marked it carefully on his calendar and was planning to be there. What went wrong?

Question #2: The Missing Reading

"I will be traveling to Eretz Yisroel this spring, and will miss one of the parshios. Can I make up the missing kieras haTorah?"

Question #3: The Missing Parshah

"I will be traveling from Eretz Yisroel to the United States after Pesach. Do I need to review the parshah twice?"

Question #4: The Missing Aliyah

"May I accept an aliyah for a parshah that is not the one I will be reading on Shabbos?"

Introduction:

The Jerusalem audience is waiting for the special guest speaker. The scheduled time comes and goes, and the organizer is also wondering why the speaker did not apprise him of a delay. Finally, he begins making phone calls and discovers that the speaker -- is still in Brooklyn!

What happened? Well... arrangements had been made for the speaker to speak on Wednesday of parshas Balak. Both sides confirmed the date on their calendars -- but neither side realized that they were not talking about the same date!

This year we have a very interesting phenomenon that affects baalei keri'ah, calendar makers, those travelling to or from Eretz Yisroel, and authors whose articles are published in Torah publications worldwide. When Acharon shel Pesach falls on Shabbos in a leap year, there is a difference in the weekly Torah reading between what is read in Eretz Yisroel and what is read in chutz la'aretz – for a very long period of time – over three months – until the Shabbos of Matos/Masei, during the Three Weeks and immediately before Shabbos Chazon. Although Acharon shel Pesach falls on Shabbos fairly frequently, most of the time this is in a common year, and the difference between the observances of chutz la'aretz and of Eretz Yisroel last for only a few weeks.

Why the different reading?

When the Eighth Day of Pesach, Acharon shel Pesach, falls on Shabbos, the Jews of chutz la'aretz, where this day is Yom Tov, read a special Torah reading in honor of Yom Tov that begins with the words Aseir te'aseir. In Eretz Yisroel, where Pesach is only seven days long, this Shabbos is after Pesach (although the house is still chometz-free), and the reading is parshas Acharei Mos, which is usually the first reading after Pesach in a leap year (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 428:4). On the subsequent Shabbos, the Jews of Eretz Yisroel already read parshas Kedoshim, whereas outside Eretz Yisroel the reading is parshas Acharei Mos, since for them it is the first Shabbos after Pesach. Until mid-summer, chutz la'aretz will consistently be a week "behind" Eretz Yisroel. Thus, this year in Eretz Yisroel, the Wednesday of parshas Behar is the 10th of Iyar or May 11th. However, in chutz la'aretz, the Wednesday of parshas Behar is a week later, on the 17th of Iyar or May 18th.

This phenomenon, whereby the readings of Eretz Yisroel and chutz la'aretz are a week apart, continues until the Shabbos that falls on July 30th. On that Shabbos, in chutz la'aretz, parshios Matos and Masei are read together, whereas in Eretz Yisroel that week is parshas Masei, parshas Matos having been read the Shabbos before.

The ramifications of these practices affect not only speakers missing their engagements, and writers, such as myself, who live in Eretz Yisroel but write parshah columns that are published in chutz la'aretz. Anyone traveling to Eretz Yisroel during these three months will miss a parshah on his trip there, and anyone traveling from Eretz Yisroel to chutz la'aretz will hear the same parshah on two consecutive Shabbosos. Those from Eretz Yisroel who spend Pesach in chutz la'aretz will find that they have missed a parshah. Unless, of course, they decide to stay in Eretz Yisroel until the Nine Days. But this latter solution will not help someone who is living temporarily in Eretz Yisroel and therefore observing two days of Yom Tov. Assuming that he attends a chutz la'aretz minyan on Acharon shel Pesach, he will miss hearing parshas Acharei.

Several halachic questions result from this phenomenon. Is a traveler or someone who attended a chutz la'aretz minyan on Acharon shel Pesach required to make up the missed parshah, and, if so, how? During which week does he review the parshah shenayim mikra ve'echad Targum? If he will be hearing a repeated parshah, is he required to review the parshah again on the consecutive week? Can he receive an aliyah or "lein" on a Torah reading that is not "his" parshah? These are some of the questions that result from this occurrence.

Why doesn't chutz la'aretz catch up earlier?

But first, let us understand why this phenomenon lasts for such a long time! After all, there are numerous weeks when chutz la'aretz could "double up" two parshios and thereby "catch up" to Eretz Yisroel. Why don't they double up Acharei Mos/Kedoshim the week after Pesach, or Behar/Bechukosei, which is only a few weeks later, rather than reading five weeks of sefer Vayikra and virtually all of sefer Bamidbar, before straightening out the problem?

Even more, when Shavuos falls on Friday in Eretz Yisroel, or on Friday and Shabbos in chutz la'aretz in a common year. When this happens in a leap year, in chutz la'aretz the parshios of Chukas and Balak are combined in order to "catch up." Why not follow the same procedure when acharon shel Pesach falls on Shabbos, instead of waiting until Matos/Masei.

As you can imagine, we are not the first to raise these questions. They are discussed by one of the great sixteenth-century halachic authorities, the Maharit (Shu"t Maharit, Volume II, Orach Chayim #4). He answers that the reason why chutz la'aretz does not double the parshah earlier is because this would make Shavuos fall earlier than it should. Ideally, Shavuos should be observed between Bamidbar and Naso, and combining either Acharei Mos with Kedoshim, or Behar with Bechukosei pushes Shavuos until after parshas Naso.

Shavuos after Bamidbar

Why should Shavuos be after Bamidbar? The Gemara establishes certain rules how the parshios should be spaced through the year. Ezra decreed that the Jews should read the curses of the tochacha in Vayikra before Shavuos and those of Devarim before Rosh Hashanah. Why? In order to end the year together with its curses! [The Gemara then comments:] We well understand why we read the tochacha of Devarim before Rosh Hashanah, because the year is ending, but why is that of Vayikra read before Shavuos? Is Shavuos the beginning of a year? Yes, Shavuos is the beginning of a new year, as the Mishnah explains that the world is judged on Shavuos for its fruit" (Megillah 31b).

We see from this Gemara that we must space out our parshios so that we read from the beginning of Bereishis, which we begin on Simchas Torah, until parshas Bechukosei at the end of Vayikra before Shavuos. We then space our parshios so that we complete the second tochacha in parshas Ki Savo before Rosh Hashanah. One week or two?

However, this Gemara does not seem to explain our practice. Neither of these parshios, Bechukosei or Ki Savo, is ever read immediately before Shavuos or Rosh Hashanah. There is always at least one other Shabbos wedged between. This practice is already noted by Tosafos (Megillah 31b s.v. Kelalos). The Levush (Orach Chayim 428:4) explains that, without the intervening Shabbos as a shield, the Satan could use the tochacha as a means of accusing us on the judgment day. The intervening Shabbos, when we read a different parshah, prevents the Satan from his attempt at prosecuting, and, as a result, we can declare: End the year together with its curses!

The Maharit explains that not only should we have one intervening Shabbos between the reading of the tochacha and the judgment day, we should preferably have only one Shabbos between the two. That is why chutz la'aretz postpones doubling a parshah until after Shavuos. (Indeed, parshas Naso is read in Eretz Yisroel before Shavuos in these years, but that is because there is no better option. In chutz la'aretz, since one can have the readings occur on the preferred weeks, Shavuos is observed on its optimal Shabbos reading.)

Why not Chukas/Balak?

However, the Maharit notes that this does not explain why the parshios of Chukas and Balak are not combined, although he notes that, in his day, some communities indeed did read the two together when Acharon shel Pesach fell on Shabbos. The Syrian communities followed this practice and in these years combined parshios Chukas and Balak together, and read Matos and Masei on separate weeks. There is no Jewish community in Syria anymore today that reads kerias haTorah according to this custom – for that matter, there is, unfortunately, no longer any Jewish community in Syria that reads kerias haTorah according to any custom. I am under the impression that the communities of Aleppo Jews currently living in Flatbush and in Deal, New Jersey, although they strictly follow the customs that they have

practiced for centuries, do not follow this approach. I am not familiar with the custom of other Syrian communities.

To explain the common custom that does not combine the parshios of Chukas and Balak, the Maharit concludes that once most of the summer has passed and the difference is only what to read on three Shabbosos, we combine Matos with Masei which are usually combined, rather than Chukas and Balak, which are usually separate. The two parshios, Matos and Masei, are almost always read together, and are separated only when the year requires an extra Shabbos reading, as it does this year in Eretz Yisroel. Truthfully, we should view Matos and Masei as one long parshah (making the combination the largest parshah in the Torah) that occasionally needs to be divided, rather than as two parshios that are usually combined.

The Maharit explains further that combining the parshios of Matos and Masei emphasizes that the reading for Shabbos Chazon should be parshas Devorim and for Shabbos Nachamu should be parshas Va'eschanan. This is important, because parshas Va'eschanan includes the section of the Torah that begins with the words Ki solid banim... venoshantem, which includes an allusion to the fact that Hashem brought about the churban two years early, in order to guarantee that klal Yisroel would return to Eretz Yisroel. Since this is part of the post-Tisha Be'Av consolation, it is appropriate that people see that our reading was doubled just now, for the sake of making these readings fall on the proper Shabbosos.

One could also explain this phenomenon more simply: Matos and Masei are read on separate weeks only when there simply are otherwise not enough readings for every Shabbos of the year.

In these occasional years when Matos and Masei are read separately, parshas Pinchas falls out before the Three Weeks -- and we actually get to read the haftarah that is printed in the chumashim for parshas Pinchas, Ve'yad Hashem, from the book of Melachim. In all other years, parshas Pinchas is the first Shabbos of the Three Weeks, and the haftarah is Divrei Yirmiyahu, the opening words of the book of Yirmiyahu, which is appropriate to the season. The printers of chumashim usually elect to print Divrei Yirmiyahu as if it is the haftarah for parshas Matos, and then instruct you to read it, on most years, instead as the haftarah for Pinchas. What is more logical is to label this haftarah as the one appropriate for the first of the Three Weeks, and to print both after Pinchas. The instructions should read that on the occasional year when Pinchas falls before the 17th of Tamuz, they should read Ve'yad Hashem, and when Pinchas falls on or after the 17th of Tamuz, they should read Divrei Yirmiyahu. A note after parshas Matos should explain that when this parsha is read alone, they should read the second haftarah printed after parshas Pinchas. But, then, the printers do not usually consult with me what to do, electing instead to mimic what previous printers have done. This phenomenon affects practical halachah, but that is a topic for a different time. However, the printers' insistence to call Ve'yad Hashem the "regular" haftarah for parshas Pinchas has lead to interesting questions.

This article will be continued next week.

לע"ג

שרה משא בת ר' יעקב אליעזר ע"ה
ביליא בת (רואה) ליבע ע"ה
אנא מלכה בת ישראל ע"ה