

BS"D



To: parsha@parsha.net
From: cshulman@gmail.com

INTERNET PARSHA SHEET
ON **BEHAR BECHUKOSAI** - 5766

In our 11th cycle!

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

This week's Internet Parsha Sheet is sponsored by:

Bob & Goldie Kikin <robert.kikin@smithbarney.com> of Teaneck in commemoration of his mother's shloshim which will be on the 24th of Iyar - **Faige Bas Gedalya Zeesha**, z'l.

To sponsor an issue (proceeds to Tzedaka) email cshulman@gmail.com

From: sefira@torah.org Don't Forget

Sent: Friday, May 12, 2006 12:05 PM

To: Counting The Omer Reminder List

Subject: [Sefira/Omer] Day 37 / 5 weeks and 2 days

Tonight, the evening of Friday, May 19, will be day 37, which is 5 weeks and 2 days of the omer.

<http://www.anshe.org/parsha/behar.htm>

**Parsha Page
by Fred Toczek**

A survey of parsha thoughts from Gedolei Yisroel compiled by Fred Toczek. Perfect for printing and use at your Shabbos tisch.

© 1996-2006 - Anshe Emes Synagogue - All rights reserved 1490 S. Robertson Blvd. Los Angeles, CA 90035 310-275-5640 Infoline: 877-ANSHE-EMes
BEHAR 5757 & 5762

I. Summary

A. Shemittah (Sabbatical) Year. After the Jews took possession of Canaan, they are to observe each seventh year as a Shemittah (Sabbatical) year for the land, during which they are not to sow their fields, prune their vineyards, or reap the harvest that grew by itself.

B. Yovel (Jubilee) Year. Each 50th year was the Yovel, which was proclaimed on Yom Kippur. During the Yovel year:

1. Fields were not to be sown or harvested;
2. Hebrew slaves were to be set free; and

3. Land reverted back to its original possessor. (Thus, the price of land that was sold was based upon how many years of ownership remained before the Yovel.) Land sold because of its owner's poverty could be redeemed by either the former owner or his relative. If someone sold a house in a walled city, he could only redeem it within one year of the sale; however, homes in villages and in cities set aside for the Levi'im would revert back to their original owners during the Yovel year.

C. Prohibition of Interest. One should lend money to a poor fellow Jew without charging him interest.

D. Treatment of a Slave. If a poor Jew was forced to sell himself into servitude, his Jewish master should treat him with respect. As noted above, the servant would be set free during the Yovel year. A relative could redeem a Jewish servant by paying his master a sum based upon the number of years remaining until the Yovel.

II. Divrei Torah

Behar

A. Lil'Mode U'lilamed (Rabbi Mordechai Katz)/Artscroll Chumash

1. The significance of Shemittah.

a. Ramban notes that, like Shabbos, Shemittah bears testimony to Hashem's creation of the universe in six days and His rest on the seventh day. (This is why only the Shemittah -- not any of the Festivals -- is specifically likened to Shabbos.)

b. Shemittah (and Yovel) helps us to develop Emunah (faith in Hashem), for it acknowledges that our possessions and personal freedom are provided by Hashem and are under His dominion.

c. The Sfas Emes, z'l notes that the land's rest during the Shemittah year teaches us that the primary force in the universe is Hashem, not the laws of nature. By leaving his fields untended, the Jew demonstrates that this world is but a corridor leading to the ultimate world. However, it also teaches that one can't totally abstain from the world in which he lives. Thus, we must sow and harvest for six years (just as we must work for six days and rest on the Shabbos). This recognition infuses holiness and purpose into our workdays and years.

2. Interest and Shemittah. What is the connection between the prohibition of charging interest and the laws of Shemittah? Shemittah and the prohibition against interest remind us that our land and money, respectively, are gifts from Hashem.

3. The Highest Form of Charity. "If your brother becomes impoverished . . . you shall strengthen him". Ramban notes that this teaches us that the highest form of charity is to step in with help to prevent someone from becoming poor (e.g., by giving him/her a loan, investing in his/her business, etc.) As Rashi notes, when a donkey's load begins to slip, even one person can adjust it; but if the animal has fallen, even five people can't get it back on its feet.

B. Growth Through Torah (Rabbi Zelig Pliskin)

1. By realizing that others suffer, we can more easily cope with our own suffering. It is a mitzvah to blow the shofar to proclaim the Yovel. This was to remind the master who was to free his servant and the landowner who was to return land to its rightful owner that others were doing the same. Knowing that others are undergoing hardships makes it easier to accept our hardships, and to put our own suffering into perspective.

2. Hashem does not want you to cheat His children. The Parsha commands "and when you sell anything to your fellow man or buy from your fellow man, you shall not cheat one another". If one remains aware that Hashem is the creator of all people, he/she will be careful not to deceive others (just as one would be most careful if dealing with the offspring of an emperor). Rav Nachman was asked how it is possible to think of Hashem when involved in business, to which he replied "people find it easy to think about business when they are praying; similarly, if one really wants to, he/she can think of Hashem while engaged in business."

3. Feel an inner respect for other people. The Parsha prohibits a master giving a servant work that isn't really necessary (e.g., telling a servant to warm things up when the master doesn't really need it). Why does the Torah prohibit this, since the servant has no idea that his work is unnecessary? The Torah wants us to feel an inner respect for the dignity of others, since we are all created in Hashem's image.

C. Kol Dodi on the Torah (Rabbi David Feinstein)

1. The Emunah in Shemittah. "If you will say what will we eat in the seventh year? Behold! We will not sow and gather in crops! I [Hashem] shall ordain My blessings for you in the sixth year and it will yield a crop sufficient for the three-year period [i.e., the seventh-ninth years]." Rashi, citing Chazal, teaches that the 70 years of the Babylonian exile were punishment, measure-for-measure, for the 70 Shemittah years which the Jews failed to observe when they were on their land. But if the above verse assures the Jews that the crop from the sixth year will be excessively abundant, why would they fail to adhere to the laws of Shemittah and insist on planting or harvesting during the Shemittah year? Since the sixth year would be so abundant, one could easily be led astray into believing that the seventh year would be equally (or even more) prosperous. Thus, it required great emunah (faith in Hashem) to recognize that however attractive the short term gains were, they would disappear quickly, whereas the reward for observing mitzvos, even though it may sometimes seem long in coming, lasts forever.

2. The Prohibition Against Interest. Why does the Torah connect the prohibition against interest with the Exodus from Egypt? Homiletically, when Hashem told Abraham that his descendants would suffer exile and enslavement for 400 years, it was a debt of servitude. The debt didn't begin to be "repaid" until much later, when Jacob went down to Egypt. Furthermore, we are told that the Egyptian exile lasted only 190 years (and that the Jews were enslaved for only 116 years), since Hashem took off time to compensate for the extremely harsh labor imposed by the Egyptians at the end. Normally, when repayment of a debt is postponed, interest is accrued. However, instead of increasing the debt, Hashem reduced it. Thus, the prohibition against interest reminds us that just as Hashem forgave us the interest, we must do so for others.

D. Parsha Parables (Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky)

50 years of transition. The Torah teaches us that the end of the Yovel, a 50-year cycle in the land of Israel, there is a radical socio-economic transition: ". . . freedom shall be announced to the land and all its inhabitants." Every servant shall return home to his family. All land that was sold shall return to its original owner. "And the land shall not be sold for eternity, for I [Hashem] am the true owner of the land!" Hashem, the "Ultimate Landlord," further reminds us that all such transactions are canceled with Yovel. All of these reversions occur at the close of Yom Kippur. Why? One of the most intriguing aspects of Judaism is the concept of teshuvah (repentance). No matter how great a sin, every Jew has the ability to change his situation and undo the damage. Yom Kippur is the day that is most appropriate for teshuvah, for it represents the idea that in the world of spirituality there is no sense of permanence. The desperate soul who feels he has no chance to change begins the year with a clean slate. He is rejuvenated and revitalized. In this Parsha, the Torah tells us that this rejuvenation does not only happen spiritually. Even regarding physical or financial situations, there is no permanence. Yovel is the Yom Kippur of the material world. This concept is illustrated by the following story: A wealthy traveler came to meet the Chofetz Chaim, whose piety and brilliance were admired all over the world. Entering the sage's tiny home, the wayfarer was shocked at its simplicity. In the center of the room stood an old table and a rickety bench. The kitchen was tiny and primitive, and the small cot on the side was hardly befitting this leader of European Jewry. "Rebbe," asked the man, "where are all your possessions? How can you live with barely a thing? The Chofetz Chaim gently asked the man, "And how did you arrive here?" "By coach," the man answered. The Chofetz Chaim walked outside and peered into this very fine carriage. He then turned to the man and asked, "I see no dining room here, nor kitchen, and not even a bed?" "But Rebbe," the man protested, "I am but traveling. I don't need those amenities. I don't know where I'll be tomorrow, and they are only useful in a fixed place." The Chofetz Chaim smiled, "I, too, am traveling in this world. I know not where I will be tomorrow. I only need temporary amenities." Every Yovel on Yom Kippur we are reminded that this is a world of transition. Whether it be in our personal lives, our real estate or our spirituality, there is always movement and change. Let us remember: it is always for the best.

E. Living Each Day (Rabbi Abraham Twerski)

Perfection of Chesed. The prohibition against taking interest is one of the most formidable in the Torah. The Midrash states that on Judgment Day, any sins will be submitted for debate between accusing and defending angels, but for sin of taking interest, there is no deliberation and condemnation is immediate. Rabbi Chaim Shmulevitz states that the principle behind the prohibition of interest is that it constitutes a personal gain acquired while performing chesed (an act of kindness), in this case, lending someone money. Any act of kindness should be done altruistically, and receiving any return detracts from it and essentially destroys the concept of chesed. (One of the most important acts of chesed is attending to the burial of the dead. Obviously, there can be no anticipation of the beneficiary returning the favor. It is therefore pure chesed.) Since the overriding concern is that the person in need should receive the help he requires, the Talmud states that all acts of chesed are rewarded, even if one does them for ulterior motives. However, our goal should be to achieve the highest level of chesed, that which brings one no personal gain whatsoever. The Talmud states that the purpose of creation was to make possible the performance of chesed. This gives chesed its supreme importance. Chesed is the reason for all existence.

F. Peninim on the Torah (Rabbi A.L. Scheinbaum)

1. The meaning of Shemittah. We can derive multi-faceted lessons from Shemittah:
 - a. Horav Shimon Schwab, z"l, observes that Shemittah symbolizes mesiras nefesh, self-sacrifice. Despite one's attachment to his land, he is asked to divest himself of his source of livelihood for an entire year, in order to let all Jews and animals "trespass" on his pride and joy. Why? Because it is Hashem's command. This is true heroism!
 - b. Shemittah attests to the entire Jewish people's belief that Hashem "owns" the land. We demonstrate publicly that we are surrendering our control and ownership of the land, and renounce whatever outstanding debts are owed us. Through Shemittah, we demonstrate our faith and trust in Hashem. We do not worry while our land lies fallow. Our trust is resolute, our faith unshaken.
 - c. Shemittah attests to the Jewish people's uniqueness, further evidencing the exceptional relationship we are privileged to have with Hashem.
 - d. It is the ultimate expression of emunah (faith in Hashem) -- if one approaches Shemittah purely from a rational perspective, their scientific conclusions would not support permitting the fields to remain fallow. However, if one is able to have the faith to comply with Hashem's mandate before he strives to understand it, he can obtain a level of strength and faith comparable to that of the angels.

Something to Say (Rabbi Dovid Goldwasser)

1. The Value of Faith. "If you will say: 'what will we eat in the seventh year?'. . . I will ordain My blessing for you in the sixth year." This is an assurance to the farmers, who may not plow and plant during the Shemitta. If they ask what they will have to eat, G-d tells them that He will send His blessing in the sixth year so that they will have enough of a surplus to provide abundant food until they can resume their normal agricultural cycle. Rebbe Zishe of Anipoli analyzes the relationship between the Jewish people's question and G-d's response. It would seem from the wording of the verse that unless they demand to know "what will we eat?," G-d will not send His blessings. Is this so? R' Zishe answers that a lack of faith can close a pipeline through which blessing flows to the world. If the Jews are so lacking in faith that they must ask where their sustenance will come from, G-d tells them that He will have to take emergency measures; He says he will ordain his blessing, for it will be necessary for Him to reinstate the closed-off blessing in the world. If there had not been a lack of faith, it would have been natural for the blessings to flow.

2. True Empathy. On the same verse, the Tzor Hamor asked why G-d sends his blessing upon us only when we ask, "what will we eat?" A person who is wealthy often cannot feel the distress of the poor. G-d therefore gives the commandment of Shemitta. In observing Shemitta, wealthy people will also feel what it is like not to have everything they want. They, too, will have to turn to G-d and ask "what will we eat?" This need will arouse in them a sympathy for the lot of the poor. Because of the concern shown by the wealthy, G-d "will ordain" [H]is blessing." G-d's blessing will be sent in the merit of their sympathy.

L. Growth Through Torah (Rabbi Zelig Pliskin)

1. Yovel and Shemitta Remind Us That G-d Is Our Ruler. Rashi notes that the Torah explicitly mentions that the rest on the Shemitta year is for the Almighty, just as the Torah states this in reference to the weekly Shabbos. Rabbi Yeruchem Levovitz cites the Raavad that a fundamental principle behind the commandments is that "they are to remind us constantly that we have a Creator who is our Ruler." The Almighty gave us this earth, but after using the Earth from some time, we can mistakenly think that the earth belongs to us, and we can forget that the Almighty is the real owner. Thus, the Torah stresses in this verse that the commandment to rest in the seventh year applies to the land which the Almighty gave us. The Almighty gave us the commandment of Shemitta and Shabbot to help us internalize the awareness that he is the true Boss of the earth.

2. Be Very Careful Not to Cause People Pain with Your Words. "And you should not hurt the feelings of one another, and you shall fear the Almighty." The Torah instructs us not to say anything to another which will cause him/her emotional pain. Rabbi Schlomo Kluger commented that some people are careless with others' feeling, focusing solely on those obligations which relate to their own relationship with G-d. However, if we are not respectful of others, we will eventually be careless with those commandments between man and G-d. Therefore, in the same verse that warns us not hurt others, the Torah reminds us to fear G-d - failure to observe the first half of the verse will lead to failure to observe the latter part of the verse.

3. Do Acts Of Kindness Without Any Ulterior Motive. "Your money you shall not give him upon interest." R' Chaim Shmulevitz explains the prohibition against charging interest by noting that the Torah wants to train us to do acts of kindness without any gain. Not only are we prohibited to charge interest when lending money, but the borrower is also prohibited from paying interest in any form. When we lend money (or do any other acts of kindness), we should do so only to help others and not with any expectation of return.

Pirkei Torah (R' Mordechia Gifter)

True Bitachon. "The land will give its fruit and you will eat your fill. If you will say, 'what will we eat in the seventh year?,' I will ordain My blessing for you . . ." S'forno explains that one who does not question what he will eat in the seventh year will indeed have less produce; however, the nutritional quality of the produce will be so enhanced that he will not be required to eat as much as usual. Less will carry further, and the produce of the sixth year will thus suffice for the seventh year. However, one whose emunah is not so strong and asks what he will eat in the 7th year will have plentiful crops that will last him through the 7th year; nevertheless, these crops will be of normal (not enhance) quality. From S'forno's explanation, we note two kinds of bitachon (trust in G-d). One is the kind possessed by one who wants to completely fulfill G-d's will, but wonders how he will survive doing so. His bitachon is great, for even though he does not know what he will eat, he nonetheless fulfills G-d's will. Yet, there is an even greater level - the trust of one who performs the mitzvah and does not even inquire as to what will become of him. His bitachon is so great that he is absolutely certain that G-d will take care of him; his faith is more than a matter of perception - it is a reality!

Rabbi Frand on the Parsha

The Perfect Antidote. "When you sell from your friend or buy from your friend, do not cheat each other." Smack in the middle of the instructions respecting Shemitta, the Torah inserts the singular prohibition of not cheating others. Why does it belong here? Furthermore, why does this law - which applies to movable property, not real estate - appear in the midst of the Shemitta laws? The Beis Av explains that the underlying concept of Shemitta is to impress upon people that, in the final analysis, everything we have comes from G-d. This concept negates the rationale for cheating - a person may think that his underhanded methods brought him additional monies. But, if he believes that everything comes from G-d, he can't expect to outsmart Him. Thus, the lesson of Shemitta reinforces that cheating is not only wrong, it is futile.

Bechukosai

I. Summary

A. Blessings/Admonitions. The Book of Vayikrah concludes with Moshe contrasting the different responses that will follow the Jews' obedience or defiance of Hashem's commandments. Obedience will lead to peace and prosperity; abundant crops; and protection from our enemies. Defiance will lead to (among other things, and in stages of increasing severity): plagues; enemy sieges; and national exile. However, if the Jews repent, Hashem promises to once again remember His covenant with the Patriarchs and accept us once again as His people.

B. Contributions to the Sanctuary. The following provisions are discussed for one who made a vow to contribute towards the upkeep of the Sanctuary:

1. If one dedicates his/his family member's worth, the amount to be paid varies depending on the person's age and sex.

2. If one dedicates a kosher animal which can be used for a sacrifice, he can't substitute another animal for it. However, he can redeem a blemished animal (i.e., unfit for sacrifice) by paying its monetary value plus an additional 20% to the Kohein.

3. The redemption of land that was dedicated is based upon its value (which, as noted above, is determined by calculating the number of years remaining until the Yovel).

4. A firstling (B'chor) can't be dedicated a voluntary offering, since it is already Hashem's property.

5. A Ma'aser (tithes of produce -- the first of which was set aside for the Levites; the second of which was set aside and taken to Jerusalem to be eaten) can be redeemed by paying its value plus 20%, but a tithe of new-born animals (which were set aside for sacrifice) can't be redeemed.

II. Divrei Torah

A. LilMode U'lilamed (Rabbi Mordechai Katz)

Achdus: United we stand, divided we fall. The admonitions suggests that if the Jews defy Hashem's word, they will be smitten before their enemies. The text suggests that the "enemies" include enemies from "within" the Jewish people. History has shown that some of the worst enemies of the Jewish people have been Jews (e.g., the first person killed in the Maccabean uprising was a Hellenist Jew killed by Matisyohu when he slaughtered a pig on the Altar). History has, however, also shown the unlimited potential when Jews have united (e.g., when the Jews were united behind David and Shlomo, their prosperity was at a peak and the Holy Temple was built). We must heed the lesson of the value of achdus (unity of the entire Jewish people), not only during times of national crisis, but at all times.

B. Growth Through Torah (Rabbi Zelig Pliskin)

1. Be happy for others' good fortune. "And I will place peace in the land". Rashi states "if there is no peace there is nothing". Many people would feel satisfied with their lot, but for the fact that they're envious that others have more. When one feels sincere love for others, he isn't envious of their success and possessions -- this leads to true peace.

2. Be aware of the dangers in rejecting the Torah. The Chofetz Chaim noted that there are those who are afraid to read the admonitions in this week's Parsha. However, he gives the analogy of someone who was traveling on a dangerous path and, fearful of the narrow road, the wild animals and the other pitfalls on the route, blindfolds himself. Clearly, we can see that this is no solution. Similarly, says the Chofetz Chaim, we must be aware of the dangers of not behaving properly and failing to do good; while the main focus should be on the benefits of behaving properly and doing good, it is important that we also realize the harmful consequences of failing to do so.

3. Act in an elevated manner at home. "A person who sanctifies his home . . ." The Kotzker Rebbe notes that true holiness is not shown when one is involved in spiritual matters such as study or prayer, but when a person sanctifies his seemingly mundane daily household activities, taking advantage of the many opportunities for acts of kindness towards others in the home.

C. Majesty of Man (Rabbi A. Henach Leibowitz)

Finding time for Torah study. "If you walk in My laws . . ." The Midrash tells that King David explained a verse in Tehillim (Psalms): "I contemplated my path and my feet returned me to Your testimony," by noting that each day he decided where he had to go and what he had to do, but instead his feet carried him to learn Torah. Clearly, David didn't disregard necessary tasks; however, he possessed the wisdom to discern which tasks were truly "necessary". While we must not shirk our responsibilities to our jobs, families, etc, we should follow David's footsteps and inculcate within ourselves and our children a strong yearning to learn Torah; by so doing, we will find that we do have some time in our busy schedules for Torah study.

D. Project Genesis (Rabbi Mordecai Kamenetzky)

A history lesson. This Parsha contains stern admonitions and treacherous warnings of what will happen to the Jewish people lest they not observe the Torah. Of course the prescient predictions of misfortune are preceded with a bounty of blessing if we keep the Torah. Unfortunately, however, the good comes with the bad, and the unfavorable penalties are not omitted. They are hauntingly clear and undiluted. The Torah details calamity with Divine accuracy. It predicts enemies with foreign tongues will come from foreign lands to capture us. The Torah forewarns that these conquerors will not act like most, to leave the subjugated in their own land. They will, says the Torah, disperse the Jews throughout the entire world. Frightfully, the Parsha foreshadows the horrors of the inquisition and Holocaust with descriptions of barbarism, Jews betraying Jews, and mass starvation. The predictions are amazing in their accuracy; and more depressing, we were the victims. It's a very difficult Parsha, but the Torah must apprise us about the pain and suffering we will eventually endure. This essay is in no way attempting to answer why those bad things happened to good people. But two thousand years before the events, the Torah accurately predicts events that are unprecedented in the annals of conquerors and the vanquished. Yet the Torah doesn't end it's tochacha only with notes of despair. The strong admonitions close with a promise that, though we will be spread throughout the world we will always yearn for our homeland, feel connected to it, and that an enduring spirit and love for Judaism and our Father in Heaven will never cease. Three thousand years and countless massacres, crusades, inquisitions later it still works. Pretty powerful. That would have been a great way to end off quite a depressing portion. It would have even been a wonderful way to end the Book of Vayikrah. But the Torah ends the portion with quite an anticlimactic group of laws respecting a person's right to donate his own value or the value of any of his possessions to the Temple. He can declare his home, his animals, even himself as subject to evaluation. Moreover, the Torah assesses a value to any living soul. And that value, whether 30 silver shekels or 50 shekels, is to be donated to the Temple. What connection is the last part of the Parsha to the stern and ominous portion that precedes it? After the Nazis invaded the small village of Klausenberg, they began to celebrate in their usual sadistic fashion. They gathered the Jews into a circle in the center of town, and then paraded their Rebbe, Rabbi Yekusial Yehuda Halberstam, into the center. They began taunting and teasing him, pulling his beard and pushing him around. The vile soldiers trained their guns on him as the commander began to speak. "Tell us Rabbi," sneered the officer, "do you really believe that you are the Chosen People?" The soldiers guarding the crowd howled in laughter. But the Rebbe did not. In a serene voice, he answered loud and clear, "Most certainly." The officer became enraged. He lifted his rifle above his head and sent it crashing on the head of the Rebbe. The Rebbe fell to the ground. There was rage in the officer's voice. "Do you still think you are the Chosen People?" he yelled. Once again, the Rebbe nodded his head and said, "yes, we are." The officer became infuriated. He kicked the Rebbe in the shin and repeated. "You stupid Jew, you lie here on the ground, beaten and humiliated. What makes you think that you are the Chosen People?" From the depths of humiliation clouded in dust, the Rebbe replied. "As long as we are not the ones kicking and beating innocent people, we can call ourselves chosen." The Kotzker Rebbe explains that the Torah follows the portion of tochacha, the story of Jews kicked and beaten from their homeland, with an even more powerful message. No matter what happens, we have great value as individuals, and as a nation, now and for eternity. Hashem understands that each and every one of us is a great commodity. Lying on the ground, beaten and degraded, a Jewish man, woman, or child can declare his value to the Temple, for no matter how low any nation considers him, G-d values his great worth. And he is considered cherished for eternity.

E. Living Each Day (Rabbi Abraham Twerski)

The deception of underestimation. In this Parsha, we read the very serious consequences that will follow abandonment of the Torah. The, G-d says, "I shall remember My covenant with Jacob . . . and with Isaac . . . and with Abraham." What is the relevance of this statement in the context of the admonishment? Shelah explains that a person is held accountable commensurate with his capacities. Our

actions are judged against a very high standard since we are the descendants of the Patriarchs. We had forebears who were saintly people, thoroughly spiritual, and completely committed to Hashem's will. The yeitzer hara (evil inclination), however, never relents. If it cannot undermine our spirituality by one technique, it will try another. It is apt to delude us with misguided humility in order to gain its ends. "Why makes you think that your study of Torah is of any value?" "You act as though you are a tzaddik (righteous person), when in fact you are a degenerate." These negative thoughts are aided by our natural inclination to laziness and comfort. To combat the yeitzer hara, we must be aware of our enormous capacities. Every person has potential that approaches that of the angels (Psalms 8:6). We must maximize that potential, and not allow ourselves to be deluded that we are incapable of reaching the heights of spiritual achievement.

Something To Say (R' Dovid Goldwasser)

In Its Proper Time. "I will provide your rains in the proper time." The Maggid of Mezritch explains that the real meaning of this blessing is that the physical and material benefits we receive in this world should help, rather than hamper, us in our service of G-d. These blessings, however, should only come in their "proper time" - we ask that we not be preoccupied with mundane affairs when we need to be single-mindedly involved in spiritual matters.

Majesty of Man (Rabbi A. Henach Leibowitz)

Finding time for Torah study. "If you walk in My laws . . ." The Midrash tells that King David explained a verse in Tehillim (Psalms): "I contemplated my path and my feet returned me to Your testimony," by noting that each day he decided where he had to go and what he had to do, but instead his feet carried him to learn Torah. Clearly, David didn't disregard necessary tasks; however, he possessed the wisdom to discern which tasks were truly "necessary". While we must not shirk our responsibilities to our jobs, families, etc, we should follow David's footsteps and inculcate within ourselves and our children a strong yearning to learn Torah; by so doing, we will find that we do have some time in our busy schedules for Torah study.

...

© 1996-2006 - Anshe Emes Synagogue - All rights reserved 1490 S. Robertson Blvd. Los Angeles, CA 90035 310-275-5640 Infoline: 877-ANSHE-EMes

From: TorahWeb.org [torahweb@torahweb.org] Sent: May 17, 2006
Subject: Rabbi Benjamin Yudin - Seeking a Position with No Benefits
<http://www.torahweb.org/thisWeek.html>

Rabbi Benjamin Yudin
Seeking a Position with No Benefits

Rashi begins his commentary on Parshas Behar with the famous question of "mah inyan shemitah eitzel Har Sinai?" His question remains unanswered when we informs us that it comes to teach that as the laws of Shmitah were given at Sinai with all its nuances and intricacies, similarly all of the particulars of all the mitzvos were given at Sinai. The question remains; could not any other mitzvah have served in this capacity, teaching that all its parts were taught at Sinai?

Rav Yosef Salant zt"l in his Be'er Yosef suggests a fascinating answer. As the Yerushalmi notes (relating to (Shemos 6:13) "vayetzaveim el Bnei Yisroel") regarding Hashem's telling Moshe to give Bnei Yisroel the mitzvah of shiluach avadim (to free their slaves they would have in the future), that it is so difficult for a master to free a slave. It was only that they were in Mitzrayim, feeling the plight of slavery, that they could accept upon themselves this mitzvah at that time. Similarly, Behar Sinai, refers to the very special environment that preceded Matan Torah. The Gemarah (Shabbos 146a) teaches that when the Satan beguiled Chava to eat of the forbidden fruit in Gan Eden, he injected in her a zuhamah - an impurity, which among other things manifested itself in doubt, specifically doubting the oneness of Hashem and the complete authenticity of his Torah. This zuhamah was purged and expunged from them during the six day encampment at Sinai (from Rosh Chodesh Sivan to the 6th of Sivan). Thus the special introduction of Shmitah beign given at Har Sinai is to be understood as follows. The mitzvah of Shmitah is an incredibly difficult mitzvah (see Vayikra Rabbah, beginning of Parshas Vayikra). To relinquish ownership of your land, to remove the "No Trespassing" sign, could only happen at Sinai, after being purged from the zuhamah.

The Chinuch (Mitzvah 84) writes that the mitzvah of Shmitah, in addition to serving as a reminder to the Jewish nation that Hashem created the world in six days and rested on the seventh (and hence we work six units and rest on the seventh, both in the realm of days and years), gives us an additional opportunity to emulate Hashem (v'halachta b'drachav-Devorim 28:9). Just as Hashem bestows in His generosity blessings upon man and does not ask anything in return for Himself [1], the mitzvah of Shmitah trains the Jew to be altruistic, to open his field to all, rich and poor alike, without any strings attached or immediate benefit for the farmer.

Similarly, in Parshas Behar (Vayikra 25:36) the Torah says "do not take from him interest and increase; you shall fear your G-d and let your brother live with you." At first glance it is most difficult to understand why it is forbidden to take interest on a loan. To begin with, the lender will charge less interest than the bank. In addition, the borrower is only too happy to pay. Thus, just as one can forgo and cancel a debt owed to him, wherein lies the sin if the borrower is willing and happy to pay interest? The answer, explains Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz zt"l is that we are not dealing with a mitzvah bein adam lachaveiro (an interpersonal mitzvah), but rather bein adam laMakom (between man and G-d). If the lender charges interest, he is benefiting from the plight and circumstances of his neighbor in need. He is personally gaining, literally, at the expense of another. Note that prior to matan Torah we would have called lending on interest a chesed. Independent of what you take for yourself, you have helped the next one. However, Behar Sinai we are taught a higher level of giving, one of n'divus, i.e. emulating Hashem by assisting without any personal benefit whatsoever.

Case in point: a neighbor assists another in a fashion that is clear to all. It involved time, effort, and money. After the kindness was performed, the recipient did not even say "Thank you" for the neighbor's help. The neighbor, the practitioner of the kindness, is appalled - "imagine, he did not even say "thank you!" An honest evaluation is to take place. If the good neighbor is troubled by the flaw in the recipient's character, that is understandable and acceptable. If, however, on a personal note he is slighted, hurt, and offended, then this can serve as the barometer as to the true measure and degree of altruism in his chesed. If the lack of appreciation on the part of the recipient disturbs the neighbor personally, it reveals a lack of total altruism in his service. He has yet to achieve, and must further aspire to, v'halachta b'drachav, emulating the ways of Hashem, which includes assisting without any strings attached.

This ennobling character trait of altruism is not only taught by specific mitzvos, such as shmitah and the prohibition or ribis, in Parshas Behar, but it is also culled from the holy city of Yerushalayim. It is well known that the Torah imposes a vacation on the Jewish farmer in the first, second, fourth and fifth years of the shmita cycle. After giving ten percent of his crop to the Levi, the land owner is to take an additional ten percent (either of the actual produce or the monetary equivalent thereof which is then used to purchase food in Yerushalayim), and eat it in Yerushalayim (Devorim 14:22-27). Tosafos (Bava Basra 21a) writes that the experience of observing the kohanim officiate in the Beis Hamikdash contributed and inspired the visitor to greater spirituality, as it says, "so that you will learn to fear Hashem, your G-d, all the days" (ibid 23).

In addition, commenting on the verse in Tehillim (48:3) "fairest of cities, joy of all the Earth" the Medrash Shemos Rabbah(52:5) understands David's description of Yerushalayim to refer not only to its physical beauty, but that in accordance with the teaching of Rabbi Yochanan - that there was a specific designated location where one did their personal financial accounting, outside the holy city proper. The balancing of one's checkbook, as important and practical for one's day to day operations, was of a personal nature. This was not to be done, ideally, in Yerushalayim. There, one's focus was to be on K'ir shechubra la yachdav - a city that is united and unites. A city of total altruism.

May our praying and pining for Yerushalayim further awaken within us these especially rich unique Jewish traits.

[1] The many mitzvos He asks us to observe using our resources are all for our good. For example, in the merit of giving a tenth of our produce we become wealthy, as Chazal explain the posuk "aser t'aser" - giving a tenth of our produce ("aser") so that you will become wealthy "t'aser").

Copyright © 2006 by The TorahWeb Foundation. All rights reserved.

<http://members.aol.com/eylevine/behar.htm>

Hadrash Ve-Haiyun

by the Reisha Rav, HaGoan Rav Aaron Levine TZ"l

Elucidated and Adapted by Efraim Levine

Behar

Speak to the children of Israel and say to them: When you come into the land that I give you, the land shall observe a Shabbos rest for Hashem. For six years you may sow your field and for six years you may prune your vineyard; and you may gather in its crops but on the seventh year a Shabbos Shabboson shall be for the land. Your field you shall not sow and your vineyard you shall not prune. (Vayikra 25:2:3)

We may ask two questions. One, why does the posuk introduce the parsha of shemitah with a general command that the land observe a Shabbos rest for Hashem? Why couldn't the posuk omit the introduction and immediately state that for six years you may sow and prune and in the seventh you shall have the land rest for Hashem? Second, why with regard to the first reference of shemitah does the posuk call it just Shabbos rest whereas in the second reference it calls it a Shabbos Shabboson i.e., a double Shabbos?

Preliminary to answering these questions let us ask the same question with regard to the regular Shabbos i.e., the seventh day of the week. In parshas Yisro (Shemos 20:9-10) the posuk says, "six days shall you work but the seventh day is Shabbos to Hashem your G-d." Here Shabbos is mentioned with a single expression of rest. However, in parshas emor (Vayikra 23:3) the posuk says, "for a six day period, labor may be done, and the seventh day is a Shabbos Shabboson." Here Shabbos is mentioned with a double expression of rest. Why the change?

The answer to this question may be found in a mechilta in parshas Ki sisa. The mechilta notes that in some places the posuk says you shall do work as in Yisro, yet in other places it says that work shall be done as in parshas emor. Why in one posuk is labor referred to as an active activity whereas in the other a passive activity. The mechilta answers that it depends on the spiritual plight of the Jewish people. When we do the will of Hashem then we merit that others do our labor. It is to such a state that the posuk refers to when it speaks of work in the passive form. The connotation is that we ourselves will not do the work rather others will do it for us. Since livelihood activities don't consume all our time, we will be left with free time to serve Hashem. However, when our spiritual plight does not merit for us the freeing up of time from our livelihood activities, the posuk refers to our work activity during the week in the active form.

The above thought gives us an understanding as to why in one place Shabbos is expressed in the singular and in the other in double. When we merit that our work is done through others then in truth we experience a taste of Shabbos the whole week, for after all we are not working. If this is the case how then is Shabbos different than the rest of the week? The posuk responds that in such times our Shabbos will be a Shabbos Shabboson i.e., a double Shabbos. The seventh days will have an extra holiness that builds on the taste of Shabbos experienced during the week. However, when we do not merit having our work done through others, but instead we are preoccupied with livelihood activities during the course of the week, then, our Shabbos is just a single Shabbos in that we rest from our daily labor.

The same idea can be applied to shemitah. When we merit that others do our work for us then in truth we are experiencing a taste of shemitah the first six years of the cycle. How then is Shemitah different from the first six years? The answer is that at such times shemitah is at the level of Shabbos Shabboson i.e., a double dosage of shemitah. However, when we do not merit such grace and we do labor the first six years to produce our sustenance, then, the shemitah is only a single rest in contrast to the labor of the other six years.

Using this idea we may reinterpret the posuk. The posuk first tells us that in the seventh year the land shall rest for Hashem. In this posuk the rest is referred to as a single Shabbos rest. The next posuk goes on to explain why this is so. This is because you are actively planting and working the land. In other words, it is the time when you are not fulfilling the will of Hashem i.e., galus, and must provide for your own sustenance. Only then will it be a single rest. The posuk continues "vi-asafta es tivuasha." The vav of vi-asafta can be interpreted as "but." The posuk thereby states but if you will be living at a time where you do not sow and prune the land but only reap the profits by gathering in the produce then your shemitah will be a Shabbos Shabboson. In other words, if you are living at a time when you enjoy good fortune where your work is done on your behalf and experience a taste of shemitah for the first six years of the cycle then the actual shemitah will be a double rest.

By doing the Will of Hashem, we can look forward to earn our sustenance with little dissipation of our energies and go on to enjoy the pleasure of the double Shabbos during the year that the land rests with a double dosage of Shabbos.

From: Kol Torah [koltorah@koltorah.org] Sent: April 28, 2006 To: koltorah@koltorah.org

Rabi Akiva: The Inspiration for Religious Zionism

KOL TORAH A Student Publication of the Torah Academy of Bergen County Parshat Tazria & Metzora 1 Iyar 5766 April 29, 2006 Vol.15 No.29

**Rabi Akiva: The Inspiration for Religious Zionism – Part One
by Rabbi Chaim Jachter**

The Y4 Shiur of TABC in 5764 had the privilege of hearing a very special Shiur from Rav Yoel Bin Nun, who is Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivat Kibbutz HaDati and a leading voice in the area of Tanach. In honor of Yom HaAtzmaut, we will begin a series based on this beautiful Shiur, with a number of additions to Rav Yoel's core thesis. I am aware of the awesome responsibility of presenting Rav Yoel's Torah and I assume responsibility for any error in transmission. I also wish to thank the many audiences to whom I have presented this Shiur who have shared their insights, some of which are incorporated into this essay. I also discussed this topic further with Rav Yoel in the summer of 5765 and have included some of his insights into this series. I also thank my Talmid Roni Kaplan (TABC '06) for the discussions that we have had about this topic over the past two years.

The Last Time to Eat Korban Pesach – Rabi Akiva vs. Rabi Elazar ben Azariah The Gemara in a number of places (Berachot 9a, Pesachim 120b, and Megilla 21a) records a celebrated dispute between Rabi Akiva and Rabi Elazar ben Azariah regarding the latest time one is permitted to eat the Korban Pesach. Rabi Akiva permits the Korban Pesach to be eaten until dawn, while Rabi Elazar ben Azariah believes that one may eat the Korban Pesach only until Chatzot (midnight). Rava (Pesachim 120b) states that this dispute also applies to the latest time one is permitted to eat the Afikoman which, in the absence of the Beit HaMikdash, symbolically represents the Korban Pesach. Interestingly, the Rishonim (see the opinions summarized in the Biur Halacha 477:1 s.v. VeYehei) are divided regarding which opinion is normative. The Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 477:1), while not resolving the dispute, recommends finishing the Afikoman before Chatzot in order to accommodate Rabi Elazar ben Azariah's opinion (also see Biur Halacha ad. loc. s.v. VeYehei). This dispute seems to depend upon the question of when exactly Bnei Yisrael left Mitzrayim (see Ramban Shemos 12:31 and the Ritva's commentary to the Haggada page 37 in the Mossad HaRav Kook Torat Chaim edition; but see Rabi Abba's understanding of this dispute as presented in Brachot 9a). Rabi Akiva believes that Bnei Yisrael left at dawn, whereas Rabi Elazar ben Azariah seems to believe that we left shortly after midnight. A straightforward reading of Shemos 12:29-39 seems to indicate that Bnei Yisrael did leave shortly after midnight. It also explains why they were unable to bake bread before they left. If we did not leave until dawn, then there would have been ample opportunity to bake bread before we

left. On the other hand, Hashem's unambiguous command not to leave our homes until dawn (Shemot 12:22) seems to support Rabi Akiva's view. Rav Yoel explains that, according to Rabi Akiva, Bnei Yisrael did not have the opportunity to bake bread before dawn because they were "on-call" that night. They sat waiting to receive word to leave Mitzrayim at a moment's notice and thus were unable to bake bread all that night. Rav Yoel compares this situation to his service in the Israeli army. Often times, his unit would be put on alert and had to be ready to spring into action at a moment's notice. In such a situation, one simply had to sit and wait and could do nothing else. Rav Yoel asserts that according to Rabi Elazar ben Azariah, Bnei Yisrael indeed did not leave their homes before dawn because it became "dawn" sometime after midnight on the fifteenth of Nissan. In other words, Rabi Elazar ben Azariah believes that the departure from Mitzrayim occurred in a miraculous fashion – it became dawn in the middle of the night. Incidentally, this might be a way to defend the Avnei Neizer (O. C. 381) from Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik's criticism (presented in Harerei Kedem 2:196-197). The Avnei Neizer believes that, according to Rabi Elazar ben Azariah, the prohibition to eat after consuming the Afikoman expires after Chatzot. After Chatzot on the night of the fifteenth is considered to be morning according to Rabi Elazar ben Azariah regarding the Mitzvot of that night, and the prohibition to eat after Afikoman does not extend into the next morning.

The Philosophical Basis for the Dispute between Rabi Akiva and Rabi Elazar ben Azariah Rav Yoel asserts that the philosophical basis for the dispute between Rabi Akiva and Rabi Elazar ben Azariah is how Geulah (redemption) operates from a Torah perspective. According to Rabi Elazar ben Azariah, Geulah is a purely miraculous process. We define an event as an authentic Geulah experience only if a miracle such as night being transformed into day occurs. Rabi Akiva, on the other hand, believes that the process of Geulah can also be a natural one- night does not have to turn into day in order to define a process as Geulah.

Ramifications of this Dispute – The Bar Kochva Rebellion This fundamental philosophical dispute has ramifications for many very important issues. One such ramification is how to assess the Bar Kochva rebellion against the Romans in the year 135 C.E. Rabi Akiva asserted that Bar Kochva had the potential to be the Mashiach (Talmud Yerushalmi Taanit 4:5). Other Tannaim vehemently disagreed. Rav Yoel argues that this dispute hinged on the issue of how to define Geulah. Rabi Akiva's disputants believed that Geulah cannot occur absent an overt miracle. Thus, they felt that the people should wait for an overt miracle before joining Bar Kochva's rebellion against the Roman Empire. On the other hand, Rabi Akiva believed that an overt miracle is not a prerequisite for Geulah, and thus Bar Kochva had the potential to become Mashiach even without such a miracle.

Shir HaShirim Rav Yoel adds that Rabi Akiva is consistent with his opinion (Yadayim 3:5) that all of the books of Tanach are holy, but Shir HaShirim is "holy of holies". Rav Yoel argues that this statement is a quintessential expression of Rabi Akiva's philosophy because Shir HaShirim describes our relationship with Hashem in natural terms, such as the love between husband and wife. I would add that it is possible that this statement also reflects the special relationship between Rabi Akiva and his wife Rachel, who brought him to a life of Torah study and close connection to Hashem. Rabi Akiva's love for his wife brought him to love Hashem. I wish to add to this insight in light of Professor Aviezer Ravitzsky's (a noted professor of Jewish philosophy at Hebrew University who spoke at Congregation Rinat Yisrael in 5764) explanation of Rabi Akiva's evaluation of Shir HaShirim. Dr. Ravitzsky suggested that it is self-evident that all books of Tanach are holy. However, Shir HaShirim has the potential to be misread as a secular love poem. One who chooses to forego the secular reading of Shir HaShirim and instead chooses to read it as an allegorical expression of our deep connection to Hashem is Holy of Holies. This approach might be consistent with Rabi Akiva's philosophy of fusing the natural with the supernatural.

Evaluating Medinat Yisrael A most important ramification of the Rabi Akiva-Rabi Elazar ben Azariah dispute is how one evaluates Medinat Yisrael as it currently functions. Rabi Elazar ben Azariah would not consider it a manifestation of Geulah since no overt miracles have occurred. Indeed, Rav Shlomo Wolbe zt"l writes in his celebrated work Alei Shur that only a Navi can determine that the beginning of the Geulah has arrived. Rabi Akiva, though, would likely see Medinat Yisrael as having potential to develop into Yemot HaMashiach even though no open miracles have occurred. I find it interesting to note that just as the Halachic dispute regarding the last time to finish the Afikoman has not been resolved, so too Orthodox Jews have not reached a consensus view regarding how to evaluate Medinat Yisrael. A Talmid asked, based on this analysis, whether one is permitted to eat the Afikoman until dawn, as he/she is committed to Religious Zionism, which adopts Rabi Akiva's outlook (hence the name of the Religious Zionist youth movement – Bnei Akiva). I responded that Halachic matters are not resolved by this type of analysis (see Teshuvot Heichal Yitzchak Even HaEzer 2:43 and Gray Matter 1:227), and that even we religious Zionists should do their best to complete the Afikoman (and Hallel,

see Rama O.C. 477:1) before Chatzot. Interestingly, these two approaches to Geulah are expressed in the Maharsha's comments to Sanhedrin 98a. The Gemara there cites Rabi Abba, who asserts that the ultimate sign that the Geulah has arrived is if the trees in Eretz Yisrael are once again productive. The Maharsha presents two opinions regarding this passage in the Gemara. One approach is that the Gemara speaks of natural fruits, and the second approach is that it is speaking of supernatural fruits. It seems that these two explanations reflect the dispute between Rabi Akiva and Rabi Elazar ben Azariah regarding the nature of the process of Geulah. Rav Yoel commented to me that if one understands Rabi Abba as referring to natural fruits, then one can understand why Rabi Abba (Brachot 9a) argues that even Rabi Elazar ben Azariah agrees that we left Mitzrayim in the morning (as we explained). Rabi Abba adopts a natural approach to Geulah in Sanhedrin 98a and wishes to demonstrate that all opinions are in harmony with this understanding.

Biographical Influences My Talmid Roni Kaplan suggested to me that Rabi Akiva might have been influenced to adopt this approach by his background. The Gemara (Ketubot 62b and Nedarim 50a) records that Rabi Akiva worked as a shepherd and was not a Torah scholar until he married. The fact that he lived a "natural" life for many years may have impacted his thinking when he became an eminent Torah scholar. One who is raised in a rabbinical home and is educated by Rabbanim from an early age might not be inclined to interpret the Torah in such a natural manner. Next week we shall (IY"H and B"N) present more ramifications of Rav Yoel Bin Nun's understanding of the dispute between Rabi Akiva and Rabi Elazar ben Azariah.

Rabi Akiva: The Inspiration for Religious Zionism – Part Two by Rabbi Chaim Jachter

Last week we began to present a Shiur from Rav Yoel Bin Nun analyzing the dispute between Rabi Akiva and Rabi Elazar ben Azariah regarding the latest time that one is permitted to eat the Korban Pesach (and Afikoman) on the Seder night. Rav Yoel understood that this dispute hinges upon the question whether Geulah arrives only in an entirely miraculous manner (Rabi Elazar ben Azariah) or can also occur in a somewhat natural way (Rabi Akiva). Rav Yoel suggested a number of ramifications of this dispute, and we added several others as well.

Understanding the Miracle of Chanukah – Rambam vs. Rashi I believe that Rav Yoel's approach can serve as an important insight regarding a passage in the Rambam (Hilchot Chanukah 3:1). The Rambam lists the restoration of Jewish sovereignty over Eretz Yisrael for more than two hundred years among the reasons why we celebrate Chanukah. Many of my Rebbeim (including Rav Yehuda Amital, Rav Aharon Lichtenstein, Rav Hershel Schachter, and Rav Menachem Genack) cite this Rambam as a source for our support of Medinat Yisrael despite the spiritual flaws of many of its leaders and institutions. They note that the Rambam believes it worthwhile to celebrate the restoration of Jewish sovereignty over Eretz Yisrael from 165 B.C.E. to 70 C.E. despite the serious spiritual flaws of most of the Jewish leaders of the time. Herod and Yannai (kings during that time period) killed Talmidei Chachamin, and Chazal felt compelled to refrain from exercising Halachic authority over the Jewish monarchy of that time (Sanhedrin 18a-19b) due to its refusal to yield to Torah authority. I have often wondered what the Chareidi response to this argument would be. I believe, though, that Rav Yoel's approach allows for an adequate response. One could argue that the Rambam represents only the approach of Rabi Akiva. Indeed, the Rambam consistently codifies Rabi Akiva's opinion regarding the latest time to eat the Korban Pesach (Hilchot Korban Pesach 8:15 and the evaluation of Bar Kochva in Hilchot Melachim 11:3).

Rashi, on the other hand, seems to reject the Rambam's approach to Chanukah. The Gemara (Shabbat 21b) asks "What is Chanukah?" The Gemara responds by presenting the miracle of the oil lasting for eight days. Rashi (s.v. Mai) explains the question "What is Chanukah" to mean "Which event moved Chazal to establish the holiday of Chanukah." Accordingly, it seems that according to Rashi we celebrate Chanukah only because of the overt miracle of the oil lasting eight days, not because of the military victory of the Chashmonaim or the reestablishment of Jewish sovereignty over Eretz Yisrael. Indeed, the Maharatz Chiyut (Shabbat 21b) comments that this Gemara as explained by Rashi teaches that Chanukah would not have been established as a holiday if not for the overt miracle. Thus, Rashi seems to adopt the view of Rabi Elazar ben Azariah, whereas the Rambam seems to support the Religious Zionist outlook on Medinat Yisrael and Yom Haatzmaut. Accordingly, Rashi's evaluation of Chanukah could be cited in support of the Chareidi evaluation of Medinat Yisrael and Yom Haatzmaut. The Third Beit Hamikdash, the Messianic Era, and the Renewal of Semicha I suggest that this dispute between the Rambam and Rashi might also be reflected in their dispute regarding how the third Beit Hamikdash will be rebuilt. Rashi (Sukkah 41a s.v. Ee Nami) and Tosafot (who rule in accordance with Rabi Elazar ben Azariah in most of their commentaries, see Megillah 21a Tosafot s.v. LeAtuyei, Zevachim 57b s.v. VeEeba'it Eimah, and Sukkah 41a s.v. Ee Nami) rule that the third Beit Hamikdash will miraculously

descend from the heavens. The Rambam (Hilchot Melachim 11:1), on the other hand, believes that the third Beit Hamikdash will be built by human hands. This dispute also seems to reflect the Rabi Akiva-Rabi Elazar ben Azariah dispute regarding the nature of the process of Geulah. Indeed, it is the Rambam (Hilchot Melachim 12:2) who codifies Shmuel's teaching (Brachot 34b) that the primary difference between current epoch and the Messianic era is that we will no longer have to submit to the authority of non-Torah jurisdictions. This is certainly a more natural, less miraculous understanding of the era of the Mashiach (also see Rav Itamar Warhaftig's essay on Parashat Bechukotai 5765, that is available on the website of Bar Ilan University, for analysis of the varying approaches to Vayikra 26:6). Similarly, the Rambam (Peirush HaMishnayot to Sanhedrin 1:1 and Hilchot Sanhedrin 4:11) suggests a "natural" means of renewing Semicha, the full-fledged ordination of rabbis that was passed down from generation to generation and ceased during the early Amoraic period due to Roman government persecution. The Rambam believes that all of the rabbis of Eretz Yisrael are authorized convene and confer full-fledged Semicha upon deserving candidates. He argues that if the Sanhedrin cannot be revived by humans, then there is no way to restore it at all. The Radbaz (commenting to Rambam's Hilchot Sanhedrin 4:11) responds that Semicha can simply be renewed by Eliyahu HaNavi who will come before the arrival of the Mashiach (Malachi 3:23). The Radbaz argues that Eliyahu is a recipient of the full-fledged Semicha (see the Rambam's introduction to the Mishneh Torah) and is authorized to confer it upon others. It is interesting that the Rambam believes that Semicha must be renewed in a "natural" manner involving no miracle. The Radbaz, on the other hand, does not hesitate to assert that Semicha will be revived by Eliyahu HaNavi, who will return to us in a miraculous fashion.

College Education and Preparation to Earn a Living A contemporary dispute between Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik and Rav Moshe Feinstein regarding attending college also seems to reflect the Rabi Akiva-Rabi Elazar ben Azariah dispute. Rav Moshe Feinstein is presented (Teshuvot Igrot Moshe Yoreh Deah 4:36) as ruling that a boy should not attend college, as it will interfere with achievement in his Torah studies. Rav Moshe argues that attending college in order to improve one's future ability to earn a living is inappropriate. He argues that one should be concerned with earning a living only when it becomes a relevant issue. Rav Aharon Rakefet, on the other hand, relates (Torah U'Madda Journal volume 2 page 134) that when he and his friends were debating whether they should attend college, Rav Soloveitchik advised them that in "our times" one must attend college. The Rav argued that Chazal urge us to combine Torah with Derech Eretz and that college attendance is the contemporary application of Derech Eretz. One might argue that the Rav follows the model of Rabi Akiva (Pesachim 112a) and the Rambam (Hilchot Matanot Anayim 10:18) who assert that "Aseh Shabatcha Chol VeAl Yitztareich el Habriyot", "Better that one eat ordinary meals on Shabbat rather than be dependent on charity." Rabi Akiva and the Rambam advise acting in "natural" ways to earn a living even if it involves diminishing somewhat the spiritual quality of one's life. Similarly, we in the Modern Orthodox world believe in giving our children a proper secular education even if it involves some spiritual sacrifice (i.e. fewer hours studying Torah during the school year) so that they should eventually be able to earn a proper living and not be dependent on others. This dispute appears to be at the root of the dispute (Berachot 35b) between Rabi Yishmael and Rabi Shimon bar Yochai regarding whether one should combine Torah study with earning a living. The 5765 Y9 TABC Gemara Shiur (cited in TABC's Bikkurei Shabbat) argues that it also appears to be the core of the dispute between Rabi Shimon bar Yochai and Rabi Yehuda (Shabbat 33b) regarding how to evaluate the improvements the Roman government made to Eretz Yisrael by building bridges and roads. We hope to eventually present an essay in Kol Torah devoted to an analysis of this very interesting Sugya.

Sukkot I also find it interesting that it is Rabi Akiva who asserts (Sukkah 11b) that the Sukkot that we lived in the Sinai desert were "natural" (actual Sukkot), unlike Rabi Eliezer, who asserts that we were enveloped by divine clouds that constituted our homes at that time. Once again, we find that Rabi Akiva adopts the "natural" interpretation of a Biblical event. Rav Yoel told me that this interpretation does not fit perfectly because the Sifra (Vayikra 23:43) presents the dispute differently than the Talmud Bavli. The Sifra presents Rabi Akiva as the one who asserts that we were enveloped by divine clouds.

The Role of the King I believe, based on a Shiur that I heard from Rav Itamar Warhaftig (delivered at Congregation Rinat Yisrael in July 2004), that this might be the root of the dispute between Rashi and the Rambam regarding the role of the king. Rashi (Sanhedrin 20b) believes that the king should not fight battles- his job is limited to disciplining rebellious individuals within society. The Rambam (Hilchot Melachim 4:10), though, believes that the role of the king is to wage war. The Rambam seems to believe that we must live naturally and appoint a leader who will establish a standing army that is trained and well-equipped. Rashi, however, seems to believe that, if we are worthy, we have no need to establish a regular standing

army. Rashi appears to believe that in case of battle we will gather and, with the guidance of a spiritual leader, emerge victorious despite the absence of any military strategy. Examples for winning battles in such a manner include the fight that Devorah led against Sisera (Shofetim 4) and Shmuel led against the Pelishtim (Shmuel I 7). In addition, I recall hearing that Nechama Leibowitz suggested that the dispute between Religious Zionists and the Chareidi community seems to hinge on the dispute between Rashi and the Ramban (at the beginning of Parashat Shelach, Bemidbar 13) regarding whether it was a good idea (in theory) to send Meraglim (spies) to Eretz Yisrael. The Ramban believes that it was a good idea, as it is the natural way that nations and individuals conduct their lives. On the other hand, Rashi seems to oppose the idea of sending Meraglim, presumably because Bnei Yisrael should have had more faith in Hashem. A problem with this analysis of the Ramban is the fact that the Ramban (Bereishit 12:10) criticizes Avraham Avinu for leaving Eretz Yisrael during a time of famine. The Ramban writes that Avraham Avinu should have had more faith that Hashem would have saved him from the famine. According to our analysis, it is difficult to understand why the Ramban criticizes Avraham Avinu for behaving in a natural manner. A possible answer might be suggested in light of an idea that I once heard from Rav Hayyim Angel. He explains that the Ramban believes that it was a sin only for someone of Avraham Avinu's spiritual stature not to trust in Hashem. Ordinary Jews may function in a normal manner. The Ramban's comments to Vayikra 26:11 regarding medicine may be understood in a similar manner. Next week we shall (Y"H and B"N) conclude our presentation of Rav Yoel's Shiur with a number of other ramifications and some innovative interpretations of two stories that we recite at the Seder.

Rabi Akiva: The Inspiration for Religious Zionism – Part Three by Rabbi Chaim Jachter

In the last two weeks we have presented Rav Yoel Bin Nun's analysis of the dispute between Rabi Akiva and Rabi Elazar ben Azariah regarding the latest time for eating the Korban Pesach (and Afikoman) at the Seder. Rav Yoel understands that the dispute hinges upon how one understands the process of Geulah. Rabi Elazar ben Azariah believes that it must occur in an entirely miraculous fashion, and Rabi Akiva understands that it can occur in a somewhat "natural" manner as well. Rav Yoel suggested some ramifications of this dispute and we have suggested other ramifications as well. This week we shall conclude our presentation of Rav Yoel's Shiur.

The Heavenly Throne The Gemara (Chagigah 14a) records a Tannaitic dispute regarding a Pasuk in Daniel (7:9) that indicates that there are two heavenly thrones. Rabi Akiva at first suggests that one throne is for Hashem and one for David. Rabi Yossi HaGelili responds by critiquing Rabi Akiva for "naturalizing" the Shechina (Hashem's presence). The Gemara records that Rabi Akiva accepted Rabi Yosi HaGelili's criticism and retracted his interpretation. However, the fact that Rabi Akiva even suggested this interpretation seems to reflect his opinion that Hashem conducts the world in a somewhat "natural" manner.

Ein Mazal LeYisrael The Rambam (Hilchot Avodot Kochavim 11:16) is famous for insisting that there is no truth to witchcraft and soothsayers. He believes that not only does the Torah forbid engaging in these activities, but also that they are also fraudulent and false. Many other Rishonim (such as the Ramban, Devarim 18:13) disagree with the Rambam, arguing that there is some truth to these matters, and the Torah simply forbids us from engaging in them. This appears to be yet another example of the Rambam's understanding that Hashem operates in a "natural" and rational manner. Perhaps the Rambam derives some support for his assertion from the Gemara (Shabbat 56b). The Gemara relates that a soothsayer predicted that Rabi Akiva's daughter would die from snakebite on the day of her wedding. In reality, she did not die, because she was saved by the merit of the Tzedakah she had given to an indigent individual. The Gemara deduces from this incident that "Ein Mazal LeYisrael," "The Jews are unaffected by Mazal." The Rambam might interpret Rabi Akiva as teaching that there is no truth to the predictions of soothsayers and that one's fate is determined solely by one's behavior. The Rambam once again might be following the path blazed by Rabi Akiva.

Tanach Study Rav Moshe Shternbuch (Teshuvot VeHanhagot 2:457) writes that one should study Nach only when mature, since only the mystical explanations of Tanach are significant. Rav Shternbuch sees no value in understanding Nach in a "natural" manner. We in the Religious Zionist community, who do attach value to a "natural" and rational understanding of Tanach, seem to be following in the footsteps of the Rambam and Rabi Akiva. Rav Yoel's Explanation of Rabi Elazar ben Azariah and Rabi Akiva Sharing a Seder in Bnei Brak Rav Yoel raises the question (which has been raised by many others as well) how Rabi Elazar ben Azariah participated in the Mitzvah of Sippur Yetziat Mitzrayim until dawn along with Rabi Akiva in Bnei Brak. According to Rabi Elazar ben Azariah it is no longer considered "night" after Chatzot on the fifteenth of Nissan (as we explained in the first part of this series). Rav Yoel answers that Bnei Brak was the home of Rabi

Akiva (see Sanhedrin 32b), and Rabi Elazar ben Azariah acted in accordance with Rabi Akiva's view since he was at the home of Rabi Akiva (see Shulchan Aruch O.C. 170:5).

Rav Yoel notes that this is particularly noteworthy because of the profound Hashkafic ramifications of this dispute between Rabi Akiva and Rabi Elazar ben Azariah (as we have discussed). Nevertheless, Rabi Elazar ben Azariah was sufficiently open-minded to be able to participate in a Seder with Rabi Akiva that followed Rabi Akiva's Halachic and Hashkafic views. Rav Yoel commented that he wishes that the same would occur today.

Using this insight, Rav Yoel creatively explained why it was the students of Rabi Elazar ben Azariah who entered the Seder and announced that it was time to recite the Shema. Rav Yoel surmises that since Talmidim tend to be less flexible than their Rebbeim, the Talmidim of Rabi Elazar ben Azariah left the Seder in Bnei Brak after Chatzot in accordance with their Rebbe's view. They remained outside Rabi Akiva's home and were upset that their Rebbe "caved in" to Rabi Akiva's view, especially in light of the great Hashkafic implications of the dispute. However, once dawn came, the Talmidim could not tolerate the situation any longer and marched into the Seder (Ad SheBa'u HaTalmidim) to put an end to what they perceived as an impropriety. One might add that this is the reason why the Haggadah subsequently presents Rabi Elazar ben Azariah's statement that he appears as if he is seventy years old (see Berachot 28a). After the Haggadah has devoted a paragraph to Rabi Elazar ben Azariah's deferral to Rabi Akiva's view of Geulah, the Haggadah informs us that Rabi Elazar ben Azariah did not retract his view. By referring to the outright miracle of his change of appearance, Rabi Elazar ben Azariah teaches that his personal Geulah and the Geulah of his generation (from the conflict surrounding the impeachment of Rabban Gamliel, see *ibid.* 27b) hinged upon an outright miracle. In fact, it might be for this reason that Rabi Elazar ben Azariah insists (the Haggadah records this at this juncture) that Yetziat Mitzraim be recalled even at night. After all, Rabi Elazar ben Azariah is the one who believes that the redemption from Mitzraim occurred during the nighttime. It is interesting to note that the Rambam (Hilchot Keriat Shema 1:3) rules in accordance with Rabi Elazar ben Azariah that we must recall Yetziat Mitzraim at night, even though he rules in accordance with Rabi Akiva that the Korban Pesach may be eaten until the morning of the fifteenth of Nissan. It could be that this explains why Rabi Elazar ben Azariah's view was not accepted until Ben Zoma made his Derashah from the words "Kol Yemei Chayecha," teaching that we must remember Yetziat Mitzraim at night. Before Ben Zoma made his Derashah, Rabi Elazar ben Azariah's opinion was not accepted since it hinged upon his dispute with Rabi Akiva regarding whether Bnei Yisrael left Mitzraim in the evening or not. Ben Zoma's Derashah taught that even those who agree with Rabi Akiva that Bnei Yisrael left Mitzraim in the morning could agree that we must recall Yetziat Mitzraim at night. The Haggadah records a story where Rabi Elazar ben Azariah deferred to the opinion of Rabi Akiva and subsequently records how followers of Rabi Akiva can accept Rabi Elazar ben Azariah's ruling requiring us to recall Yetziat Mitzraim at night.

Recovery from the Bar Kochva Rebellion The failure of the Bar Kochva rebellion might prove that Rabi Akiva's opinion has been rejected. Indeed, Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik (cited in *Nefesh Harav* p. 88) believes that history proves certain opinions either correct or incorrect. In fact, Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch (commentary to *Devarim* 8:10) writes that the Berachah of Hatov VeHaMeitiv that Chazal appended to Birkat HaMazon after the failed Bar Kochva revolt is designed to "Keep the warning constantly in mind not to make the attempt again to restore the Jewish State by their own force of arms but to leave that national future to G-d's management." However, Rav Soloveitchik (in his *Five Derashot*) argues that the success of Zionist movement to establish *Medinat Yisrael* against all odds proves that Hashem wants us to restore a Jewish State. We might suggest a compromise. Until the late nineteenth century, Hashem wanted *Am Yisrael* to follow Rabi Elazar ben Azariah's philosophy and not attempt to reestablish Jewish sovereignty. However, beginning with the end of the nineteenth century, when efforts to resettle Eretz Yisrael started to be successful, Religious Zionists believe that Hashem wishes for us to follow Rabi Akiva's understanding of Geulah.

Conclusion According to Rav Yoel's beautiful Shiur, the dispute that rages today among Orthodox Jews regarding the State of Israel is a reflection of the ancient dispute between Rabi Akiva and Rabi Elazar ben Azariah. We contemporary disputants should learn a lesson from the respect that Rabi Akiva and Rabi Elazar ben Azariah showed each other. Modern Orthodox Bnei Torah can be confident that they are following the approach of Rabi Akiva, and we can be respectful of Chareidi Bnei Torah who follow the approach of Rabi Elazar ben Azariah.

Staff: Editors-in-Chief: Josh Markovic Executive Editor: Avi Wollman
Publication Managers: Gavriel Metzger, Yitzchak Richmond Publication Editors:
Ari Gartenberg, Avi Levinson Publishing Managers: Dov Rossman, Shmuel Reece
Business Manager: Jesse Nowlin Webmaster: Michael Rosenthal Staff: Tzvi Atkin,
David Gross, Josh Rubin, Chaim Strassman, Chaim Strauss, Dani Yaros, Tzvi
Zuckier Faculty Advisor: Rabbi Chaim Jachter

To request mail, fax, or email subscriptions, or to sponsor an issue, please contact us at: Kol Torah c/o Torah Academy of Bergen County 1600 Queen Anne Road Teaneck, NJ 07666 Phone: (201) 837-7696 Fax: (201) 837-9027
koltorah@koltorah.org <http://www.koltorah.org> This publication contains Torah matter and should be treated accordingly

From: kby-parsha-owner@kby.org on behalf of Kerem B'Yavneh Online
[feedback@kby.org] Sent: May 18, 2006 7:03 PM To: KBY Parsha
Subject: Parshat Behar

Behar "For the Land is Mine"

Rosh Hayeshiva Rav Mordechai Greenberg shlita

Parshat Behar contains many halachot regarding Eretz Yisrael. It contains the laws of Shmitah and Yovel, as well as the laws relating to the selling and repurchase of fields and houses in Israel. The reason given in the pasuk for these laws, which are all unique to the Land of Israel, is the fact that "the land is Mine" (*Vayikra* 25:23). This is not merely a statement of legal ownership, but one attesting to the inherent value of Israel. The Ramban writes in parshat Acharei Mot (*Vayikra* 18:25), "The Land of Israel is the Nachala [heritage] of G-d." Similarly, R. Yehuda HaLevi speaks at length about the significance of Israel as "the land before G-d" (*Kuzari* 2:9-24).

In the second paragraph of Birkat HaMazon [grace after meals], we thank G-d for giving us the good Land of Israel and for taking us out of Egypt. This order, though, seems backwards. After all, G-d first took us out of Egypt, and only later gave us the Land of Israel. R. Yaakov Emden, in his *siddur*, explains that although Israel was second chronologically, it is primary in importance. The entire exodus was oriented toward reaching Israel, as is evident from the four phrases of redemption: "I will free you ... I will save you ... I will redeem you ... I will take you...", all for the purpose of "I will bring you to the land" (*Shemot* 6:6-8).

Although it appears that the exodus had another goal, to "worship G-d on this mountain [of Sinai]" (*Shemot* 3:12), the two goals are not at all contradictory, and in fact complement one another. R. Yaakov Emden explains (in the introduction to his *Beit Yaakov siddur*) that both the Nation of Israel and the Land of Israel are referred to as the heritage of G-d. Just as the Torah says regarding the land, "The land is Mine," so too it says regarding the nation, "the Israelites are My servants" (*Vayikra* 25:55). The glory of the Torah depends on the linkage of the two - the Nation of Israel in the Land of Israel. Conversely, the greatest cause of *Bittul Torah* is the exile of Israel from their land. (*Hagiga* 5b)

The connection between the Nation of Israel and their land is spiritual, and is unlike that of all other nations and their lands. History teaches that a nation becomes attached to its land through a three-stage process. First, a large group of people gathers in a certain place to settle in a permanent manner. Then, over the course of time, they jointly experience many events. This creates within them a historical love for the area, and thereby an emotional bond is formed to their country. This is not the case, however, regarding the Nation of Israel, who forged a bond with their land even before becoming a nation. Our forefathers went to Egypt as only seventy people. They settled there for merely three generations, and even there they were only foreigners. Still, they left Egypt with their eyes and hearts set on the Land of Israel.

Israel's uniqueness is not limited to spiritual matters, but even applies to physical activities, in that everything that is done in it is holy. For this reason the Gra (the Vilna Gaon) used to pray, "May G-d grant me the merit to plant with my own hands fruit trees around Jerusalem, to fulfill the mitzvah of, 'When you enter the land and plant fruit trees'" (*Vayikra* 19:23). Similarly, the Chatam Sofer writes that manual labor in Israel is included in the Mitzvah of settling the land and bringing forth its holy fruit. The Torah therefore commands, "Gather your grain" (*Devarim* 11:14). Even Boaz winnows his grain at night as a Mitzvah (*Ruth* 3:2). Just as one would not say, "I will not lay Tefillin because I am learning Torah," so too one should not say, "I will not gather my grain because of involvement in Torah." It is

even possible that other professions that have a societal value are included in this mitzvah. (see Hiddushim of Chatam Sofer to Sukkah, s.v. Etrog hakushi)

This importance of the Land of Israel in the worship of G-d is highlighted in the conclusion of our parsha, "I am the Lord, your G-d, who took you out of the land of Egypt, to give you the land of Canaan, to be your G-d" (25:38). Rashi comments, "Anyone who lives in the land of Israel - I will be his G-d. Anyone who leaves it - is like one who worships idols!"

To unsubscribe, or to subscribe to additional mailings, please visit <http://www.kby.org/torah/subscriptions.cfm>.

From: National Council of Young Israel [YI_Torah@lb.bcentral.com]

Sent: May 18, 2006

Subject: NCYI Dvar Torah: Parshiyot Behar-Bechukotai

Guest Rabbi: **Rabbi Mordechai Rhine** Young Israel of Cherry Hill, NJ

Blessings of Anticipation In this week's parsha the Torah describes the mitzvah of shemita. We are told that the farmer is not permitted to plant, to prune, or to harvest the produce of his field. This is a tremendous demand to make of the farmer and of a society that depended on local agriculture.

The Torah acknowledges the enormity of the test and states: "If you will ask, 'What will we eat during this seventh year...' I shall command My blessing in the sixth year," so that you will be provided for during shemita.

Likewise the Medrash declares that those "of great strength", the people of fortitude described in Tehillim 103, are those who observe shemita.

Such is the magnitude of the test that they have passed by allowing the land to lie fallow during shemita.

One simple question: If HaShem promises that there will be a bumper crop in the sixth year [and there certainly will be, because it is a Torah guarantee] then what is so hard about observing the mitzvah of shemita? Once that guarantee was in place, why is this mitzvah viewed as such a great challenge. If in the sixth year your harvest was double or triple its norm, wouldn't you also observe shemita happily. Why are those who observe shemita considered to be people of great strength, faith, and fortitude?

There are different times in the shemita cycle that the question "What will we eat during the seventh year?" might have been asked. The question might have been asked before the bumper crop of the sixth year, in which case the abundance of blessing in the sixth year would indeed remove the challenge to observance. But it is possible that the question might have been asked after the bumper crop, but before observing the shemita year.

I would like to suggest that the question "What will we eat during the seventh year?" was asked after experiencing the blessing of the sixth year but before the shemita year began. The challenge to observe shemita is a challenge which is basic to the human condition. The human being thinks, "The blessing provided until now is mine. I pocketed it; I spent it." Now there is a challenge to do a mitzvah. A human being may sincerely ask: Where will I get the wherewithal to do the mitzvah?

The Torah's statement "I will provide blessing in the sixth year" is not just a promise. The statement "I will provide in the sixth year," is intended to be educational. The Torah recognizes that a Jew may say, "The blessing of the sixth year was nice. But how will I observe this mitzvah?" So the Torah proceeds to introduce a new way of thinking. The blessing preceding a challenge isn't yours to do with it as you choose. The blessing of the sixth year was given to you in anticipation of the challenge, so that you would have the wherewithal to meet the challenge of shemita properly.

I recall a story of a young man who lost his job, and approached his father for financial assistance. His father asked, "You've been working for

awhile son. Don't you have any money saved away?" The son responded that he did, "But I'm saving it for a rainy day." "Well son," the father said with a gentle smile, "I think it's raining."

Even after the blessing of the sixth year, shemita observance is a challenge. The challenge is to realize that the blessing which was provided was to be allocated to this year's mitzvah. So often we take the blessing and pocket it. We use it on the proverbial "trip to Europe". Then we turn to HaShem and sincerely ask, "How will I be able to observe the mitzvah of today?"

I recall a family that moved into town when I was in high school. They purchased an expensive home, did renovations, and even upgraded both of their cars. Before their neighbors even got to know them they were already going on a vacation. We didn't see much of them during July or August, but when September rolled around the town was in an uproar. It seems that when they were asked to pay tuition for their children they responded that they couldn't afford it. It was a very difficult situation. It is quite probable that they really couldn't afford the tuition. But they couldn't afford it because they had spent it.

When HaShem says "I will command My blessing in the sixth year," it is educational. HaShem is saying, "Hello! The reason I am giving you such blessing is so that you can observe properly the mitzvah which will follow.

There are times that HaShem provides the "refuah before the makkah, the solution before the challenge". He recognizes the challenges ahead as formidable, so he grants us the talents, the contacts, or the resources so that we will be equipped and ready. A person who pays attention will recognize a blessing as foreshadowing a mitzvah opportunity.

Those who observe shemita are called strong in observance because the normal human response is to spend or stash the blessing away. We might take the blessing and use it on a home improvement, or lock it away for retirement. Then we might ask, "How can I observe mitzvos?" Indeed, even after the blessing of the sixth year, shemita observance is still a big challenge.

Our generation is historically the wealthiest of all the exiles. HaShem has declared upon us, "I have commanded my blessing." May we merit to be people of strength, and use our resources for mitzvah opportunities.

(additional Divrei Torah by this author can be accessed at www.teach613.org)

Join the National Council of Young Israel at the 94th Annual Dinner NCYI's Weekly Divrei Torah Bulletin is sponsored by the Henry, Bertha and Edward Rothman Foundation - Rochester, New York; Cleveland, Ohio; Circleville, Ohio To receive a free e-mail subscription to NCYI's weekly Torah Bulletin, send an email to: YI_Torah@lb.bcentral.com c 2006 National Council of Young Israel. All Rights Reserved.

<http://www.chiefrabbi.org/>

Covenant & Conversation

Thoughts on the Weekly Parsha from

Sir Jonathan Sacks

Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the British Commonwealth

[From 2 years ago 5764]

<http://www.chiefrabbi.org/tt-index.html>

Behar-Bechukotai - The Politics of Responsibility

The 26th chapter of Vayikra sets out with stunning clarity the terms of Jewish life under the covenant. On the one hand, there is an idyllic picture of the blessing of divine favour:

"If you follow my decrees and are careful to obey my commands, I will send you rain in its season, and the ground will yield its crops and the trees of the field their fruit . . . I will grant peace in the land, and you will lie down and no one will make you afraid. I will remove savage beasts from the land, and the sword will not pass through your country . . . I will look on you with favor and make you fruitful and increase your numbers, and I will keep my covenant with you . . . I will walk among you and be your G-d, and you will be my people. I am the LORD your G-d, who brought you out of Egypt so that you would no longer be slaves to the Egyptians; I

broke the bars of your yoke and enabled you to walk with heads held high. On the other there is the terrifying series of curses, known as the tochachah (rebuke, remonstrance), should the Israelites fail to honour their mission as a holy nation:

"But if you will not listen to me and carry out all these commands, and if you reject my decrees and abhor my laws and fail to carry out all my commands and so violate my covenant, then I will do this to you: I will bring upon you sudden terror, wasting diseases and fever that will destroy your sight and drain away your life. You will plant seed in vain, because your enemies will eat it . . . If after all this you will not listen to me, I will punish you for your sins seven times over. I will break down your stubborn pride and make the sky above you like iron and the ground beneath you like bronze . . . If in spite of this you still do not listen to me but continue to be hostile toward me, then in my anger I will be hostile toward you, and I myself will punish you for your sins seven times over . . . I will turn your cities into ruins and lay waste your sanctuaries, and I will take no delight in the pleasing aroma of your offerings. I will lay waste the land, so that your enemies who live there will be appalled . . . As for those of you who are left, I will make their hearts so fearful in the lands of their enemies that the sound of a windblown leaf will put them to flight. They will run as though fleeing from the sword, and they will fall, even though no one is pursuing them . . . Read in its entirety, this passage is more like Holocaust literature than anything else. The repeated phrases - "if after all this . . . if despite this . . . if despite everything" - come like a series of hammer-blows of fate. It is a passage shattering in its impact, all the more so since so much of it came true at various times in Jewish history.

Yet the curses end with the most profound promise of ultimate consolation:

Yet in spite of this, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not reject them or abhor them so as to destroy them completely, breaking my covenant with them. I am the LORD their G-d. For their sake I will remember the covenant with their ancestors whom I brought out of Egypt in the sight of the nations to be their G-d. I am the LORD ."

The Jewish people will be eternal. They may suffer, but they will never be destroyed. They will undergo exile but eventually they will return.

This - stated with the utmost drama - is the logic of covenant. Unlike other conceptions of history or politics, covenant sees nothing inevitable, or even natural, about the fate of a people. Israel does not follow the usual laws of the rise and fall of civilizations. The Jewish people were not to see their national existence in terms of cosmology (written into the structure of the universe, immutable, fixed for all time), as did the ancient Mesopotamians and Egyptians. Nor were they to see their history as cyclical, a matter of growth and decline. Instead, it was utterly dependent on moral considerations. If Israel was true to its mission, it would flourish. If it drifted from its vocation, it would suffer defeat after defeat.

Only one other people in history has consistently seen its fate in similar terms, namely the United States. The influence of the Hebrew Bible on American history - carried by the Pilgrim Fathers, and reiterated in presidential rhetoric ever since - was decisive. Here is how one writer has described the faith of Abraham Lincoln:

We are a nation formed by a covenant, by dedication to a set of principles and by an exchange of promises to uphold and advance certain commitments among ourselves and throughout the world. Those principles and commitments are the core of American identity, the soul of the body politic. They make the American nation unique, and uniquely valuable, among and to the other nations. But the other side of the conception contains a warning very like the warnings spoken by the prophets to Israel: if we fail in our promises to each other, and lose the principles of the covenant, then we lose everything, for they are we. (John Schaar, Legitimacy and the Modern State, 291) Covenantal politics is moral politics, driving an elemental connection between the fate of a nation and its vocation. This is statehood as a matter not of power but of ethical responsibility.

One might have thought that this kind of politics robbed a nation of its freedom. Certainly this is what Spinoza believed:

This, then, was the object of the ceremonial law, that men should do nothing of their own free will, but should always act under external authority, and should continually confess by their actions and thoughts that they were not their own masters . . . (Theologico-Political Treatise, ch 5) However, in this respect, Spinoza was quite wrong. Covenant theology is, through and through, a politics of liberty.

What is happening in Vayikra 26 is an application to a nation as a whole of the equation G-d spelled out to individuals at the beginning of time:

Then the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it." The choice - G-d is saying - is in your hands. You are free to do what you choose. But actions have consequences. You cannot overeat and take no exercise, and at the same time stay healthy. You cannot act selfishly and win the respect of other people. You cannot allow injustices to prevail and sustain a cohesive society. You cannot let rulers use power for their own ends without destroying the basis of a free and

gracious social order. There is nothing mystical about these ideas. They are eminently intelligible. But they are also, and inescapably, moral.

I brought you from slavery to freedom - says G-d - and I empower you to be free. But I cannot and will not abandon you. I will not intervene in your choices, but I will instruct you on what choices you ought to make. I will teach you the constitution of liberty.

The first and most important principle is this: A nation cannot worship itself and survive. Sooner or later, power will corrupt those who wield it. If fortune favours it and it grows rich, it will become self-indulgent and eventually decadent. Its citizens will no longer have the courage to fight for their liberty, and it will fall to another, more Spartan power.

If there are gross inequalities, the people will lack a sense of the common good. If government is high-handed and non-accountable, it will fail to command the loyalty of the people. None of this takes away your freedom. It is simply the landscape within which freedom is to be exercised. You may choose this way or that, but not all paths lead to the same destination.

Once again, American presidential discourse is the best commentary to the biblical text. As John F. Kennedy put it in his inaugural address in 1961:

I have sworn before you and Almighty G-d the same solemn oath our forebears prescribed nearly a century and three quarters ago . . . [T]he same revolutionary beliefs for which our forebears fought are still at issue around the globe - the belief that the rights of man come not from the generosity of the state, but from the hand of G-d. To stay free, a nation must worship something greater than itself, nothing less than G-d and the belief that all human beings are created in His image. Self-worship on a national scale leads to totalitarianism and the extinction of liberty. It took the loss of more than 100 million lives in the 20th century to remind us of this truth.

In the face of suffering and loss, there are two fundamentally different questions an individual or nation or civilization can ask, and they lead to quite different outcomes. The first is, "What did I, or we, do wrong?" The second is, "Who did this to us?" It is not an exaggeration to say that this is the fundamental choice governing the destinies of people.

The latter is what is today known as the victim culture. It locates the source of evil outside oneself. Someone else is to blame. It is not I or we who are at fault, but some external cause. The attraction of this logic can be overpowering. It generates sympathy. It calls for, and often evokes, compassion. It is, however, deeply destructive. It leads people to see themselves as objects, not subjects. They are done to, not doers; passive, not active. The results are anger, resentment, rage, and a burning sense of injustice. None of these, however, ever leads to freedom, since by its very logic this mindset abdicates responsibility for the current circumstances in which one finds oneself. Blaming others is the suicide of liberty.

Blaming oneself, by contrast, is difficult. It means living with constant self-criticism. It is not a route to peace of mind. Yet it is profoundly empowering. It implies that, precisely because we accept responsibility for the bad things that have happened, we also have the ability to chart a different course in the future. Within the terms set by covenant, the outcome depends on us. That is the logical geography of hope. It is the proposition set out in Vayikra 26, or as Moses was later to say:

This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live. Perhaps the most profound contribution Torah made to the civilization of the West is this: that the destiny of nations lies not in the externalities of wealth or power, fate or circumstance, but in moral responsibility: the responsibility for creating and sustaining a society that honours the image of G-d within each of its citizens, rich and poor, powerful or powerless alike.

The politics of responsibility is not easy. The curses of Vayikra 26 are the very reverse of comforting. Yet the profound consolations with which they end are not accidental, nor are they wishful thinking. They are testimony to the power of the human spirit when summoned to the highest vocation. A nation that sees itself as responsible for the evils that befall it, is also a nation that has an inextinguishable power of recovery and return.

From: peninim-bounces@shemayisrael.com on behalf of Shema Yisrael Torah Network [shemalist@shemayisrael.com] Sent: May 18, 2006 6:30 AM To: Peninim Parsha

Peninim on the Torah
by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum
- ParshasBehar/Bechukosai

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

The phrase here refers to not hurting people with words. Chazal teach us that it is forbidden to remind a person of his past if it was slightly checkered or to give advice that is not really beneficial. It is worse to hurt someone with words than to hurt him financially. One can always repay the money that he has taken or has caused the

other person to lose. The hurt and humiliation, however, that the individual sustains as a result of a shtoch, jab, does not disappear.

Not only should one not denigrate his fellow, he should go out of his way to make him feel good publicly. For instance, if a group is sitting together, and a member of the group makes a statement which lacks erudition or common sense, it is wrong to degrade the statement or the individual who has made it. The best response is no response. If you cannot say something nice, keep quiet. This applies equally to facial expressions and other bodily language that allude to one's displeasure with the speaker or the speech. Regrettably, some of us have a serious problem with complimenting another person. It is almost as if saying something nice to someone constitutes a form of personal affront.

David Hamelech says in Sefer Tehillim 22:7, "But I am a worm and not a man." Horav Baruch zl, m'Meziboz explains this homiletically. There are people who are very careful not to eat any forbidden insects. They shudder at the thought that they may bite into a fruit or vegetable that has a chashash tola'im, suspicion of insects or worms. Immediately, upon discovering anything suspicious, they spit the fruit out of their mouth. Heaven forbid should they transgress this prohibition. On the other hand, if these same individuals were to become involved in a disagreement with another person, they would apparently have no problem doing whatever they deem necessary to prove that they are right. This self-righteous attitude, whereby they would never eat a worm, but would readily swallow up a man, is to what David Hamelech is alluding. He says, "I am but a worm - not a man." Treat me as a worm; you would never swallow a worm. Therefore, do not devour me.

A similar interpretation is attributed to Horav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld, zl. It was at a time when the Eidah HaChareidis instituted its own supervision on the shechitah, ritual slaughtering, in Yerushalayim. A young man whose wife had just given birth to his firstborn son was arranging a seudas Pidyon HaBen, feast in honor of the Redemption of the Firstborn. He insisted that he would only use the shechitah of the Eidah HaChareidis, while his mother-in-law refused to allow that shechitah into her home. She ordered meat from the local shechitah and prepared it for the feast. Her son-in-law was beside himself. What should he do? He turned to Rav Yosef Chaim, who replied, "David Hamelech says, 'I am a worm and not a man.' This implies that it is better to eat a worm than to suck the blood of a man. In other words, one does not hurt another person if there is any way to circumvent the issue."

This does not mean that, if one sees or hears about something inappropriate that is being done, he should ignore it, or if someone makes a statement that goes beyond the parameters of common sense, he should ignore it. If he knows that the individual in question is happy to acknowledge his shortcomings, and has a willingness to listen to and accept constructive criticism, he should, by all means, tender his feelings - in private and in a respectful manner.

Concern for the feelings of the individual applies even if the subject of one's critique is a person who is infamous for his malevolent behavior, or whose hashkafos, outlooks on life, are not synonymous with Torah dictate. In Pirkei Avos 4:3, Chazal say: "You should never treat any person as if he is worthless... for there is no person who does not have a time when he is needed."

The Koznitzer Maggid, zl, interprets this Mishnah in the following manner: Do not be loathe to any man - regardless of his literacy and behavior. Even if he is a rasha, a wicked man, you should not be condescending towards him. Why? Because, there is no man she'in lo shaah, which is usually translated as, "having his moment." In this instance, the word shaah means "turns to listen", as we say in Tefillas Retzei, in the Shemoneh Esrei, V'lisfilasam she'eih, "and to their prayer You shall listen." Everyone has his moment when he is in need, when he turns to Hashem. This does not have to be a long, penetrating prayer. It could be a simple conversation. At that moment, however, he is sincere, and Hashem listens to him. Indeed, if the rasha would have no redeeming value, Hashem would not keep him around.

Therefore, we are admonished to respect all men and to treat them with dignity - regardless of their position, religious affiliation, or level of observance. This applies even if their actions are contemptible. One may censure their actions, but he should not denigrate the individual. Indeed, it is recorded concerning the Chasam Sofer, that when the secularists began to undermine the Torah community, acting in a manner that was reprehensible and antagonistic to the Torah, the Chasam Sofer would certainly speak out against them and deride their activities. He was, however, extremely careful not to embarrass anyone publicly. After all, if Hashem has created a person and He sustains him, he must be performing a vital function. Who are we to decide otherwise?

For you are sojourners and residents with Me. (25:23)

We should never forget our position on this world. We are travelers passing by with a focus on reaching a more lofty and meaningful destination. This is what Chazal teach us in Pirkei Avos 4:16, "This world is like a lobby before the World to Come; prepare yourself in the lobby so that you may enter the banquet hall." This statement implies that during his stay in This World, the individual is like a traveler, passing

through a strange land. Therefore, one should be sure to focus his attention on his goals and objectives for the future. He should make his Torah study fixed and regular, while his mundane pursuits should be of a transient, provisional nature. The Maggid, zl, m'Dubno explains that this is the message of the pasuk. A ger is a sojourner, while a toshav is a resident. These two meanings contrast one another. Therefore, Hashem tells us that if we view our position in this world as that of a sojourner, then Hashem will be to us as a toshav, resident. In order to develop a permanent relation with Torah and mitzvos, one must view his presence on this world as nothing more than a sojourner.

The Chafetz Chaim, zl, offers the following analogy to bring the idea into greater perspective. One does not build a house by himself. He lacks the skill necessary to bring this project to fruition. He hires an architect who will draw a blueprint, followed by a builder, who does the final construction. Obviously, the dimensions allotted for the various rooms and entranceways are designed to coincide with the available space and function of the room.

There was once a wealthy man who commissioned an architect to prepare the blueprint for a magnificent home. He instructed the architect to lay out the home for him in such a manner that the entryway would be large and roomy and to do likewise for the dining area. This was all fine and well until the architect saw the size of the lot. It was not nearly as large an area as the owner had indicated. There was no way that both the entryway and dining area could be as large as he wanted. Something would have to be compromised. He presented the problem to the owner, explaining, "While the final decision is yours, I suggest that you change your dimensions for the entryway, so that the dining area can be a nice size. This is what most people do. The entryway is only of secondary significance to the dining area. If you do otherwise, you will be the joke of the community."

The nimshal, resemblance, is unambiguous. During our stay on This World, we occupy ourselves with building our great dining hall in Olam Habah. Some of us, however, are more concerned with the entryway, i.e., This World, thereby neglecting to build a sizable dining hall. We act like that foolish man who wanted to build a large vestibule at the expense of his dining room.

Parashas Bechukosai

If you will follow My decrees and observe My commandments and perform them. (26:3)

Study leads to observance, which leads to performance. Shemiras hamitzvos, observance of mitzvos, is for the most part a rhetorical phrase, since what purpose is there in "observing" a mitzvah if one does not carry it out? Mitzvos were given to us to be fulfilled. Perhaps there is a deeper meaning to shemiras hamitzvos. A shomer is a guard, a watchman. He makes sure to guard and protect whatever is in his possession, whatever has been entrusted in his care. Hashem enjoins us to guard His mitzvos, to make sure that they are not being ignored, that they are carried out to the fullest detail. It is all in the attitude one manifests towards mitzvah performance. If it is a mitzvah he cares about, he does not simply perform the mitzvah; he takes care of it, looking forward to carrying it out, making sure that everything leading up to its actual performance is properly prepared. When one guards Hashem's mitzvos, Hashem sees to it that the mitzvos serve as a protection for him. Yes, mitzvos protect the individual who cares about them. The following story demonstrates this idea.

Two Jews from a small town in Poland attached themselves to a band of Polish partisans, who were waging war with the German Army. They lived in the forest, hiding in places that were unnoticeable to the casual view of the human eye. There was always one partisan who hid in the trees outside the camp's perimeter to warn the partisans of an enemy approach. One day, the lookout gave an emergency call to break camp. He noticed that, in the distance, a German column was on its way into the forest. Immediately, they broke camp, concealing any sign that would reveal their presence, and left for the other end of the forest. Because of the tumult, the two Jewish partisans did not realize until they reached safety that they had left their Tefillin in the camp. What were they now going to do? To return to their camp meant placing their lives in danger. If they were discovered by the Nazis, they would immediately be put to death. To live without Tefillin meant a life that had very little meaning. They decided that they would return for their Tefillin.

They prayed to Hashem saying, "Ribono Shel Olam, please protect us. We are returning for our Tefillin, only so that we may serve You properly." Miraculously, they were able to avoid the German army. After they located their Tefillin, they davened and rested for a short while and prepared to return to their group at the other end of the forest. When they arrived, they were confronted with a grizzly scene: every member of their group was dead. Apparently, the Nazis had been able to locate and ambush them. Because they had returned for their Tefillin, the two Jewish partisans were spared. The mitzvah of Tefillin had protected them. It was reciprocity for the attitude they had manifest for this mitzvah.

Sponsored in memory of Mrs. Seliga Ahuva (Schur) Mandelbaum Seliga Ahuva bas HaRav Daniel a"h 26 Iyar 5751 "tnu la mepri yadeha vihaliluha bashearim maasehah" by her family HoRav Doniel z"l & Shoshana Schur

Peninim mailing list Peninim@shemayisrael.com
<http://www.shemayisrael.com/mailman/listinfo/peninim> [shemayisrael.com](http://www.shemayisrael.com)

From: Rabbi Goldwicht [rgoldwicht@yutorah.org] Sent: May 18, 2006 8:49 PM
Subject: Parashat Behar-Bechukotai 5766 **WEEKLY INSIGHTS BY RAV MEIR GOLDWICHT** Parashat Behar-Bechukotai 5766

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 The weekly sichah is compiled by a student. Please feel free to forward the weekly sichah to friends and family. If you aren't yet subscribed, you can subscribe here. A PDF version of this week's sichah can be found here. We would be delighted to hear your thoughts and suggestions at talliskattan@sbcglobal.net. Weekly Insights on the Parsha and Moadim by Rabbi Meir Goldwicht is a service of YUTORAH, the online source of the Torah of Yeshiva University. Get more parsha shiurim and thousands of other shiurim, by visiting www.yutorah.org. To unsubscribe from this list, please click here.