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**A Blessing for Those Who Ask and a Blessing for Those Who Don't**

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Weekly Portion Torah CDs: # 900, Oy! My Tefillin Are Pasul. Good Shabbos!

The Mishna states "Exile comes to the world because of Idoltary, Immorality and Incest, Murder, and the (violation of) the Sabbatical of the Land (Shmitah haAretz)" [Avos 5:11]. The Ramban in this week's parsha asks why lax observance of Shmitah triggers exile. Although it is true that there are multiple negative prohibitions associated with the laws of Shmitah, it remains a non-capital offense. The other three sins mentioned are "Cardinal sins" for which one is required to be killed rather than violate them. They are all capital offenses.

The Ramban says that the answer involves "secrets of the Torah." It is a difficult to understand fully the meaning of what the Ramban answers. However, at least part of the gist of what he answers is the following: Shmitah represents one of the fundamental ideas of Judaism -- the fact that the Almighty created the world, runs the world, and owns the world.

The Ramban, in effect, says that what Shabbos is to the days of the week, Shmitah is to the years. Just like we rest on Shabbos to proclaim and affirm that "In six days G-d created the Heavens and the Earth and on the seventh day He completed his work and He rested," so too on a macro scale, keeping the Shmitah is all about this concept of Emunah [Belief] in G-d's creation. On a macro scale, by working for six years and resting on the seventh, a person testifies, "I believe with complete faith that the Almighty is the owner of the world and He is the One who provides sustenance." Resting on Shmitah allows the farmer to put his money where his mouth is, so to speak. A person's statement of belief in G-d thus goes out of the realm of lip service and becomes concrete action, through discipline and self-sacrifice. I demonstrate my conviction that somehow G-d will provide sustenance during this year when I obey his commandment and abstain from farming my land.

We do not live in an agrarian economy so it is hard to relate to the sacrifice

implicit in Shmitah observance. But just think about it: If the Halacha was that you work for six years and each seventh year you need to tell your employer "I am taking a Sabbatical," how would that go over? We are not talking about a paid Sabbatical. You would need to ask yourself, "How am I going to pay the mortgage? How am I going to pay tuition? Where is my health insurance going to come from? I am not going to be working! I am not going to receive my regular paycheck!" That is what Shmitah is. It is literally putting one's faith on the line saying, "I believe that the parnassah [sustenance] will somehow come."

The pasuk states: "The land will give its fruit and you will eat to satisfaction; and you will dwell securely upon it." [Vayikra 25:19] Rashi interprets the phrase "you will eat to satisfaction" as "Even within the innards, there will be in it a blessing (i.e. – one will feel satisfied after having eaten a small quantity."

"How am I going to exist without an income?" The Ribono shel Olam says, "Do not worry. It is going to last." "How will it last?" "You are going to be able to live on less." "How is it going to happen?" "Do not ask any questions. It can happen."

This is the promise of "V'Achaltem L'Sovah" (you will eat to satisfaction): You will have the same amount of income but somehow it will "expand within your innards". Unbeknownst to you, away from your eye, it will miraculously be able to last.

The Torah continues: "And if you will ask 'What will we eat in the seventh year? Behold! We will not sow and we will not gather our crop!' I will ordain My blessing for you in the sixth year and it will yield a crop sufficient for the three years." [Vayikra 25:20-21] The Torah promises that in the sixth year, there will be a bountiful crop and the harvest will last for 3 years! It will provide for the sixth year, the seventh year, and the eighth year until you will once again be able to harvest the crop of the eighth year's planting.

The Sforno explains -- these pasukim address two types of individuals. At first, pasuk 19 addresses the type of individual willing to rest on Shmitah who does not ask any questions. He will survive by the miraculous blessing of "you will eat to satisfaction" – i.e. – he will feel satisfied after having eaten a small quantity.

Consider the following true story. The year 5719 (1958-1959) was a Shmitah year in Eretz Yisrael [the land of Israel]. Keeping Shmitah in those years was even more difficult than it is now. There were farms in Eretz Yisrael that kept the Shmitah that year. How did the people who observed Shmitah obtain food? They imported various kinds of vegetables from Chutz L'Aretz [outside the land of Israel]. There was only one thing they could not import. For some reason, they could not obtain onions. Lo and behold, an Egyptian freighter captain made a mistake. He made a wrong turn and his ship somehow wound up approaching the coast of Eretz Yisrael. When the crew saw what was happening, they boarded the lifeboats and literally abandoned the ship. Wow! -- An Egyptian freighter now sat off the coast of Israel. The Israeli coast guard boarded the ship. What did they find? They found onions. As a result, those who observed Shmitah had onions in 5719. "You will eat to satisfaction!" The Almighty provides.

The Sforno explains that a second group of people will ask the question: "What will we eat in the seventh year?" Those people, who do not have faith that somehow the little they have will last, possess a lesser level of Emunah and spirituality than the first group. Nevertheless, for such individuals, as well, the Almighty provides. He says "Okay. I am going to make it happen in front of your eyes." In the sixth year there will be triple the crop!

Consider. Who is better off -- the people who did not question (who somehow had to get by with a little) or the people who did ask the question (and got triple the crop!)? The answer is that the first group is better off. Triple the crop involves triple the irrigating, triple the harvesting, triple the threshing, triple the storing, triple everything. They must work like horses during the 6th year. The same number of laborers must process triple the amount of crops in a single year. However, that is the way they wanted it because they were people who did not have faith and had questions "How

will we manage?"

G-d can always provide, but how He provides depends on our level of Emunah. A person may who earn X amount of dollars and another person may earn 2X or 3X dollars and yet they can be in the same financial condition. For the fellow who makes X, somehow everything works. The person who makes 3X starts his car in the morning, puts it into reverse and his transmission falls out. The repair costs \$1,200. He finally gets to work. He calls his wife. She went to the dentist. She needs a root canal and a crown \$800 (after dental insurance coverage). The person comes home. The roofer was there. He needs a new roof that will cost \$10,000. In one day, he is out \$12,000! The next-door neighbor is making one-third the salary: His car runs like a kitten, his wife has perfect teeth, and the roof is in perfect shape. This is the distinction between "and you will eat and be satisfied" (what you have will last) and between "I will send you my blessing on the third year and you will take in triple the crop" (you will make 3X salary, but it will be a much harder income).

Rav Pam, zt"l, used to say to his students: "Some bochrim desire a 'rich shidduch'". However, there are two types of 'rich shidduchim'. There is a shidduch where the father-in-law is loaded and the groom thinks "Aha! I am set for life!" However, there is another shidduch where the girl comes from a simple home with simple parents and with simple expectations. She can get by with next to nothing. The girl from the wealthy home is used to the good life. She expects that and she is going to want that. Her husband will need to come up with that for her. The simple girl from the simple home, who will be satisfied with an older beat up family car is a 'rich shidduch' as well, because one who does not need much is taken care of much more easily than one who has great expectations.

It is an accepted "Segulah" [good luck charm] that being a Sandek (holding the baby during a Bris Milah) brings wealth. The Steipler Gaon was a Sandek almost every day of his later years. He lived a very modest life. He was not at all wealthy. Someone once asked him why he was not rich given this "Segulah" and the fact that he was a Sandek so often. The Steipler responded, "What are you talking about? I am very wealthy! I have everything I want. What does wealthy mean? I have everything I need under the sun!" For the Steipler, wealth meant that he had a roof over his head and a Gemara. What more could he need?

We might not be able to live like that. However, that does not mean that the Steipler didn't feel he was rich. He had everything he needed. "The blessing of G-d is what brings riches." [Mishlei 10:22] Real wealth is to be happy with one's lot in life. This is true wealth...the bracha of "food being blessed in our innards"...of sensing that we have everything we need. There is no greater wealth than this.

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**Shemittah revisited.**

**By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff**

How can we pass Parshas Behar without discussing the laws of shemittah? And the fact that we read these laws annually teaches that the Torah wants us to understand the

lessons of shemittah every year. Yet many chutz la'aretz residents see no need to learn these laws, assuming that they are not relevant.

Well, guess again. Although halacha prohibits exporting shemittah produce outside Israel (Mishnah Shevi'is 6:5), much produce finds its way there. And even in chutz la'aretz we must treat fruit of Eretz Yisrael with kedushas shevi'is according to all of the laws we will now discuss.

**Situation #1: WHAT A ROAST!!**

When I was a rav in America, a knowledgeable housewife cooked a delectable roast using wine whose label indicated that it had kedushas shevi'is. Although she had no idea what this term meant, her son pointed out that they needed to ask a shaylah what to do with the roast. To make a long story short, the entire roast had to be treated with kedushas shevi'is; I will soon explain what this means.

**Situation #2: WHAT ARE SEFICHIN?**

"I noticed a sign in shul that the fruits and vegetables in the local supermarket are from Israel and must be treated appropriately. Someone told me that the vegetables are sefichin. What does that mean?"

**Situation #3: HETER MECHIRAH**

Several shemittah cycles ago I was working as a mashgiach for a properly-run American hechsher. One factory that I supervised used to manufacture bread and muffin mixes. This company was extremely careful about checking its incoming ingredients: George, the receiving clerk who also managed the warehouse, kept a careful list of what products he was to allow into the plant and what kosher symbols were acceptable.

On one visit to the plant I noticed a problem due to no fault of the company. For years, the company had been purchasing Israeli produced freeze-dried carrots with a reliable hechsher. The carrots always arrived in bulk boxes with the Israeli hechsher prominently stamped in Hebrew and the word KOSHER prominently displayed in English. George, who supervised incoming raw materials, proudly showed me through "his warehouse" and noted how he carefully marked the arrival date of each new shipment. I saw crates of the newest shipment of Israeli carrots, from the same manufacturer, and the same prominently displayed English word KOSHER on the box. However, the Hebrew stamp on the box was from a different supervisory agency, one without the same sterling reputation. The reason for the sudden change in supervisory agency was rather obvious when I noted that the Hebrew label stated very clearly "Heter Mechirah."

First, let us discuss the basics:

**LAWS OF THE LAND**

In this week's parsha, the Torah (Vayikra 25:1-7) teaches that every seventh year is shemittah; we are prohibited from working the land of Eretz Yisrael and must leave our land fallow (Avodah Zarah 15b). Just as observing the seventh day, Shabbos, demonstrates our belief in the Creator, so too, observing every seventh year as shemittah demonstrates this faith. The landowner must treat whatever grows as ownerless, allowing others to enter his field or orchard to pick and take its produce. They may take as much as their family will eat, and the landowner himself also may take this amount (see Rambam, Hilchos Shemittah 4:1).

**LAWS OF THE FRUIT**

Although shemittah observance today is mandated only midrabbanan (see Moed Katan 2b; Chazon Ish, Shevi'is 3:8), nevertheless, most of its laws are the same as they will be when observing shemittah will again become a mitzvah min hatorah. The Torah imbues shemittah produce with special sanctity, called kedushas shevi'is, declaring veho'yeshab shabbas ha'aretz lachem le'ochlah, "the produce of the shemittah should be used only for food" (Vayikra 25:6). According to accepted opinion, one is not obligated to eat shemittah food – rather, the Torah grants us permission to eat it, and we must treat it accordingly (Chazon Ish, Hilchos Shevi'is 14:10). There is much halachic detail involved in the correct use of shemittah produce. For example:

I. One may not sell shemittah produce as one would usually do in business (Rambam, Hilchos Shemittah 6:1). Although one may pick shemittah produce for one's personal consumption, one may not harvest it to sell commercially (Tosefta, Shevi'is 5:7).

II. One may not export shemittah produce outside Eretz Yisrael (Mishnah Shevi'is 6:5). There are some opinions that allow exporting shemittah wine and esrogim, although the rationales permitting this are beyond the scope of this article (Beis Ridbaz 5:18; Tzitz Hakodesh, Volume 1 #15:4).

III. Shemittah produce is intended for Jewish consumption; one may not give or sell kedushas shevi'is produce to a gentile, although one may have him join you in a meal at which shemittah produce is served (Rambam, Hilchos Shemittah 5:13 and Mahari Korkos ad loc.).

IV. If one trades or sells the shemittah produce, the food or money received in exchange also has kedushas shevi'is (Sukkah 40b).

V. One may not intentionally ruin shemittah produce (Pesachim 52b).

What types of "ruining" did the Torah prohibit? One may not cook foods that are usually eaten raw, nor may one eat raw produce that is usually cooked (Yerushalmi,

Shevi'is 8:2; Rambam, Hilchos Shevi'is 5:3). Therefore, one may not eat raw shemittah potatoes, nor may one cook shemittah cucumbers or oranges. Contemporary authorities dispute whether one may add shemittah orange or apricot to a recipe for roast or cake. Even though the roast or cake is delicious because of the added fruit, many poskim prohibit this cooking or baking since these fruit are usually eaten raw (Shu't Mishpat Cohen #85). Others permit this if it is a usual way of eating these fruits (Mishpetei Aretz page 172, footnote 10).

#### SPOILED TURTLE

One may feed shemittah produce to animals only if it is considered unfit for human consumption. This includes varieties grown for fodder, as well as peels and seeds that people do not usually eat (Rambam, Hilchos Shemittah 5:5). During the last shemittah, a neighbor of mine, whose pet turtle usually eats lettuce, had a problem what to feed it. Before shemittah he was trying to get it to eat grass, but the turtle preferred lettuce.

Similarly, juicing vegetables and most kinds of fruit is considered "ruining" the shemittah produce and prohibited, although one may press grapes, olives and lemons since the juice and oil of these fruits are considered improvements. Many contemporary authorities permit pressing oranges and grapefruits provided one treats the remaining pulp with kedushas shevi'is. Even these authorities prohibit juicing most other fruit, such as apples and pears (Minchas Shelomoh, Shevi'is pg. 185).

#### RUINING VERSUS EATING

How do we determine whether processing a food "ruins" it or not? Many poskim contend that if the processing changes the food's preferred bracha, one may not process shevi'is produce this way (Shu't Mishpat Cohen #85, based on Brachos 38a and Rambam, Hilchos Shevi'is 5:3). Since turning apples to juice reduces their bracha from ha'eitz to shehakol, this would be considered "ruining" the apples. Similarly, the fact that one recites the bracha of shehakol prior to eating a raw potato or cooked cucumbers or oranges demonstrates that treating them this way ruins the produce. According to this approach, one may not press oranges or grapefruits either, since one recites shehakol and not ha'eitz on the juice (Shu't Mishpat Cohen #85).

Those who permit squeezing oranges and grapefruits apply a different criterion, contending that since this is the most common use of these fruit it is permitted (Minchas Shelomoh, Shevi'is, page 185).

One must certainly be careful not to actively destroy shemittah produce. Therefore, one who has excess shevi'is produce may not trash it. Peels that are commonly eaten, such as cucumber or apple, still have shemittah kedusha and may not simply be disposed. Instead, these peels are placed in a plastic bag which is then placed into a small bin or box called a pach shevi'is, where it remains until the food is inedible. When it decomposes to this extent, one may dispose of the shemittah produce in the regular trash.

When eating shemittah food, one need not be concerned about the remaining bits stuck to a pot or an adult's plate that one usually just washes off; one may wash these pots and plates without concern that one is destroying shemittah produce. However, the larger amounts left behind by children or leftovers that people might save should not be disposed in the trash but should be scraped into the shemittah bin.

#### WHY DECOMPOSE?

This leads us to a question: If indeed one may not throw shemittah produce in the trash because it has sanctity, why may one do so after the produce decomposes? Does decomposition remove kedusha?

Indeed it does. Kedushas shevi'is means that as long as the food is still edible, one may not make it inedible or use it atypically. This is because shemittah food is meant to be eaten, even though there is no requirement to do so. However, once the shemittah food is inedible, it loses its special status, and may be disposed of as trash.

#### SANCTITY UNTIL SPOILAGE

This sounds very strange. Where do we find that something holy loses its special status when it becomes inedible?

Although the concept that decay eliminates sanctity seems unusual, this is only because we are unfamiliar with the mitzvos where this principle applies. Other mitzvos where this concept exists are terumah, challah, bikkurim, revai'i and maaser sheini, all cases where we do not consume the produce today because we are tamei (Rambam, Hilchos Terumos Chapter 11; Hilchos Maaser Sheini 3:11). Of these types of produce that are holy, but meant to be eaten, only shevi'is may be eaten by someone tamei. Even though someone tamei may not consume tahor terumah, challah, or maaser sheini, one also may not dispose of them or even burn them. Instead, one must place them in a secure place until they decay and only then dispose of them (Tur, Yoreh Deah 331). (We burn the special challah portion after separating it only because it has become tamei. If it did not become tamei, we could not destroy the challah portion, but would have to place it somewhere until it decays on its own, just as we do with unused shevi'is produce.)

#### A SHEMITTAH ROAST IN AMERICA

We can now explore the first question I mentioned:

1a: May one use shemittah wine to season a roast?

Although one improves the roast by adding the wine, the wine itself is ruined. Thus, some poskim prohibit using the wine in this way, whereas others permit it since this is a normal use for wine (see commentaries to Yerushalmi, Terumos 11:1).

1b: What does our American housewife do with her shemittah wine-flavored roast?

If one uses shemittah food as an ingredient, one must treat everything that absorbs its taste according to the laws of kedushas shevi'is (see Mishnah Shevi'is 7:7). Therefore, one who used shemittah potatoes in cholent or shemittah onions or bay leaves in soup must treat the entire cholent or soup according to shevi'is rules. One may not actively waste this food, nor may one feed any of it to animals until the food is spoiled to the point that people would not eat it.

Therefore, our housewife who added shemittah wine to her roast must now consider the entire roast, even the gravy and vegetables cooked with it, to have kedushas shevi'is. One serves the roast in the regular way. As mentioned above, the small scrapings left on an adult's plate may be washed off; but the larger amounts left behind by children should not be disposed in the trash, nor should the leftovers in the pot or on the platter.

Just as one may not dispose of the leftover kedushas shevi'is roast in the trash, it is unclear whether one may remove these leftovers from the refrigerator in order to hasten their decay, even to place them in a shemittah bin (see Chazon Ish, Shevi'is 14:10). However, if one removed leftover roast to serve, one is not required to return the leftovers to the refrigerator. One may not trash the leftovers, but instead one may place the leftovers somewhere until they have spoiled. To avoid the malodor that this may cause, one may place them in a plastic bag until they decay and then dispose of them.

#### SEFICHIN

The Torah permits the use of produce that grew by itself without anyone working the field during shemittah. Unfortunately, even in the days of Chazal one could find Jews who deceitfully ignored shemittah laws. One practice of unscrupulous farmers was to plant grain or vegetables, marketing them as produce that grew on its own. To make certain that these farmers did not benefit from their misdeeds, Chazal forbade all grains and vegetables, even those that grew by themselves, a prohibition called sefichin, or plants that sprouted. Sefichin are treated as non-kosher food and forbidden to eat, even requiring one to kasher the equipment that was used to cook them!

Chazal made several exceptions to this rule, including that produce of a non-Jew's field is not prohibited as sefichin.

At this point, we should address the second question I mentioned:

"I noticed a sign in shul that the some fruits and vegetables in the local supermarket are from Israel and must be treated appropriately. Someone told me that the vegetables are prohibited because they are sefichin. What does that mean?"

In all likelihood, the growers of this produce relied on heter mechirah, a topic I dealt with extensively in a different article, but which I will touch on here. (Contact me by e-mail if you would like to read that article.) The authorities who rely on heter mechirah permit most of the fieldwork to be performed only by gentiles. However, in contemporary practice, most Jewish landowners who rely on heter mechirah sell their land to a gentile, but then work it as their own. As a practical matter, few contemporary chareidi poskim permit heter mechirah, and, even among non-chareidi authorities, support for its use is waning, although there are still some who permit it. Thus, if the heter mechirah is considered a charade and not a valid sale, the grain and vegetables growing in a heter mechirah field are prohibited as sefichin. Most, but not all, chareidi poskim today consider vegetables grown through heter mechirah to be prohibited sefichin that are forbidden to eat, although one will find different opinions whether one must kasher equipment used to cook such vegetables.

#### WHY NOT FRUIT?

When Chazal prohibited sefichin, they only included in the prohibition crops that are planted annually. They did not extend the prohibition of sefichin to tree fruits and other perennial crops, such as bananas and strawberries, because there was less incentive for a cheating farmer. Although trees definitely thrive when pruned and cared for, they will produce even if left unattended for a year. Thus, the farmer had less incentive to tend his trees.

#### "GUARDED PRODUCE"

I mentioned above that a farmer must allow others free access to help themselves to any produce that grows on his trees and fields during shemittah. What is the halacha if a farmer treats this produce as his own and refuses access to it during shemittah?

The Rishonim dispute whether this will make the fruit forbidden. Some contemporary poskim prohibit the use of heter mechirah fruit on the basis that, since heter mechirah is invalid, this fruit is now considered "guarded," and therefore forbidden. Other poskim permit the fruit because they rule that the forbidden working of an orchard or treating it as private property does not prohibit its fruit (see Shu't Igros Moshe, Orach Chayim 1:186). Thus, even if one does not consider the heter mechirah to be valid, the fruit might be permitted but must be treated with kedushas shevi'is.

What about our carrot muffins? If we remember our original story, the company had unwittingly purchased heter mechirah carrots. The hechsher required the company to

return all unopened boxes of carrots to the supplier and to find an alternative source. However, by the time I discovered the problem, muffin mix using these carrots had been produced bearing the hechsher's kashrus symbol and were already distributed. The hechsher referred the shaylah to its posek, asking whether they were required to recall the product from the stores as non-kosher, or whether it was sufficient to advertise that an error occurred and allow the customer to ask his individual rav for halachic guidance. For someone living in Eretz Yisrael, observing shemittah properly involves assuming much halachic responsibility and education, and often great commitment, since shemittah-permitted produce may be more expensive than its alternative. Those living in chutz la'aretz should be aware of the halachos of shevi'is and identify with this very public demonstration and "declaration" that the Ribbono Shel Olam created the world in seven days.

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Thanks to hamelaket@gmail.com for collecting the next several items

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**Weekly Blog :: Rabbi Berel Wein**  
***Polls And Pundits***

It has been a tough month for the political experts amongst us. There were two major elections that commanded international interest and media coverage. One was here in Israel and the second one just concluded in the United Kingdom. In both instances the media, in the main, was heavily biased towards the Left. Isaac Herzog, Tzipi Livni and their left of center Zionist Union party was adored by most of the print and television media here in Israel, as well as in the United States and the Western world. "Anybody but Netanyahu" was the favored slogan of the day. Millions of foreign dollars were poured into the Israeli election, most of which was designated to the defeat of Netanyahu at all costs. The odd couple of Herzog and Livni were extolled as being the saviors of peace, decency, morality and harmonious relationships with the American president and other world leaders.

The pollsters showed a very close election with momentum favoring the Zionist Union, and Netanyahu starting to lag behind. The pundits solemnly opined that Herzog and Livni would most probably form the next government coalition. It seems that everyone was convinced of this type of election result except for the voters.

The polls were proven to be wrong, skewed and even malicious in their attempt to influence the election. The pundits, who in the main are elitist, leftist and in their hearts disdainful of the average Israeli voter, also were proven to be empty suits. Netanyahu's unexpected and unpredicted smashing victory was not only against his political opponents but also just as much a vanquishing of the pollsters and pundits. Nevertheless, remorse and apology for error and bias are rare commodities amongst those that always know better, so the beat goes on.

The United Kingdom engaged in a parliamentary election last week. Again the left-leaning media, both print and electronic, with few exceptions, predicted a neck and neck race with a strong possibility that the Labor party would form the new government coalition. Labor was led by Ed Miliband, a Jew by birth but apparently not by faith, behavior or loyalty to the Jewish cause.

We were assured by the pollsters and the media that this was going to be the closest British parliamentary election of the last half-century. The pundits were busy formulating what new policies and economic reforms the Labor government would embark upon in order to undo the policies of the Tory government enacted over the past few years.

Unlike Tony Blair who had campaigned as "New Labor," Miliband campaigned as "Old Labor" and championed the good old socialist ideas and programs that Labor stood for over most of this past century. Wishing for this type of ideological shift to occur, the pollsters and pundits wildly overestimated the popularity of Miliband and his campaign promises.

Pollsters and political prognosticators and commentators usually are able to

convince themselves of the fact that what they wish to happen should happen and therefore will happen. As such, when they are proven wrong, as they were done so convincingly in the British election just concluded, they become dismissive of the intelligence of the electorate and assign all sorts of excuses – except for their own previous bias – to explain why they were so wrong about something of which they were so certain.

Polls are many times if not most times quite accurate. Nevertheless, they are unreliable when the pollster has a personal or vested interest in the outcome. Polls depend on how the question is phrased and even on the body language and interaction between the questioner and answerer. And, another issue is that people do not always answer pollsters truthfully. I think this is especially true regarding elections, where many times the voter has not really truly made up his or her mind until actually casting a ballot.

I think that this was particularly true in the Israeli election. In interviews afterward, many of the voters stated that they voted for Netanyahu because at the last moment they could not face up to voting for a different party, even if that party was ideologically closer to their original mental makeup. The prophet stated it well: "The heart is twisted and complex; who can really discern it?" Apparently not the pollsters and pundits, who are otherwise so confident in their expertise and accuracy. It is not easy to be a pollster or political expert and they should not be judged too harshly. However, greater effort at evenhandedness, lack of bias and a personal sense of humility would undoubtedly help contribute to their greater success in the future.  
Shabbat shalom

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**Weekly Parsha Blog:: Rabbi Berel**  
***B'har***

The emphasis that the Torah places on the location – Mount Sinai – where Moshe received the Torah and its commandments, and the particular commandment regarding the observance of a sabbatical year, has been an issue of much interest to the commentators on the Torah over the ages. Rashi, quoting the famous rabbinic dictum, states that the words "Mount Sinai" indicate to us that just as this particular commandment of the sabbatical year was taught to Moshe on Mount Sinai so too are we to understand that all of the commandments of Judaism emanate from the revelation at Mount Sinai.

But perhaps there is another nuanced lesson here in the mentioning of Mount Sinai, as being the location where this commandment regarding the sabbatical year was first uttered and delivered. The Sinai desert is one of the most barren and inhospitable geographic areas on our globe. The Torah itself describes it as a great, awesome and frightening place, parched of water and short of sustenance, a place of snakes and scorpions.

To speak of a sabbatical year in this context, where and when fields and crops are not to be tended to, seems at first glance to be incongruous, to say the least. We could understand the statement of such a commandment when the Jewish people stood on the brink of entering the Land of Israel or, even more so, when they actually entered the land.

Hearing the command of letting one's fields lie fallow for a year while living in a trackless and arid desert certainly seems to be strange. But the Torah, which is eternal and not bound by time or place, comes to teach us an important lesson regarding life generally and Jewish life particularly.

I had a friend and congregant of mine during my years as a rabbi in Miami Beach fifty years ago. He was a Holocaust survivor, a man of material wealth and clever intellect. He once told me that he was a very wealthy man in Hungary before World War II. In the very late 1930s he visited the Land of Israel and on a whim purchased an apartment here in Jerusalem.

In late summer 1944, together with hundreds of thousands of other Hungarian Jews, he and his family were deported to Auschwitz His family could not survive the ordeal, though somehow he did remain alive, and

eventually he rebuilt his life and once again created a family and material success in America.

He told me that every night in the barracks of the labor camp, to which he was assigned, lying on the wooden pallet that served as his bed, in his mind he furnished the apartment that he purchased in Jerusalem. In his mind, he bought the finest furniture and wall coverings and arranged them so that the apartment shone in splendor, good taste and elegance.

He said it was this imaginary scene of the better tomorrow that kept him alive and gave him the spiritual and mental fortitude not to give up completely and just pass away, as unfortunately so many others did. To survive the desert of Sinai the Jewish people had to imagine the lush fields of the Land of Israel and a sabbatical year that would bring blessing and prosperity upon those fields and their owners.

The Torah emphasizes to us that the sabbatical year was commanded to Israel in a forbidding and dark place because of the fact that it would give hope, optimism and vision for the great blessings of the Land of Israel that they would yet live to experience.

### ***Bechukotai***

The book of Vayikra concludes this week with the Torah reading of Bechukotai. It presents rather stark choices to us. Blessings and disasters are described and it is apparently our behavior, actions and lifestyles – all of which are within our range of life choices – that will determine our individual fate and national future. It appears to be an all or nothing scenario with the Torah providing us with little or no wiggle room. And since the stakes are so high and the consequences of failure are so dire, the challenge before us is doubly daunting and even frightening.

Yet, the Torah also assures us that the Jewish people as an entity, if not all individual Jews, will somehow survive and yet prosper in the end and inherit all the blessings described in this week's Torah reading. The Jewish people will experience many defeats in the long history of civilization, in its relationship to the non-Jewish world. But none of these defeats will be of a permanent and eternal nature.

Somehow the seeming victor and conqueror will itself become vanquished while the Jewish people will continue to show resilience and fortitude. After several millennia of history and all types of human and national events, it is difficult to view the Jewish story in any other light. So, the true message that shines forth from this week's Torah reading is that of the eternal strength of the Jewish people. Not only have they survived all of the disasters outlined in this Torah reading but they have the uncanny ability to eventually triumph and succeed, no matter how great the odds against them are.

Rashi emphasizes the requirement to "toil in Torah" as being the interpretation of the first verse in Bechukotai. Toiling in Torah has many subtleties associated with it, aside from its simple meaning of hard and consistent study. In its broadest sense one can say that the Jew that toils, in no matter what field he or she is toiling, must always do so by associating one's endeavors with Torah values and behavior.

The commandment is not merely restricted to the Talmudic scholars of Israel but is a commandment to be observed by every Jew, no matter what line of work or profession one is engaged in. The life and survival of the Jew and of the Jewish people as a whole is dependent on the presence of Torah values, lifestyle and behavior in all aspects of human society. Toil, in the spiritual sense, is not restricted only to the study hall or to the scholar.

The rabbis have taught us, based on the biblical verse, that humans are born to toil; fortunate is the person whose toil is in Torah. Again, in its narrow interpretation this refers to the scholar and student of Torah. But, also again, in its broadest sense it refers to a person who is able to experience and appreciate Torah life and values, no matter his work or profession. A person that feels that the Torah accompanies him everywhere will always be reckoned among those that toil in, with and for the Torah.

Shabbat shalom

to: weekly@ohr.edu  
subject: Torah Weekly

**Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parshat Behar - Bechukotai**  
**For the week ending 23 May 2015 / 5 Sivan 5775**  
**by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com**  
**Insights**

***Yes, We Have Some Bananas!***

***"I will ordain My blessing for you in the sixth year..." (13-17)***

Seven years ago, at the end of the last Shemita cycle, a secular farmer whose produce is bananas decided that he would undertake to keep Shemita.

He approached the "Keren HaShvi'it" organization for assistance, and they stipulated that he would be registered in their program if he would also undertake to personally observe Shabbat throughout the Shemita year.

He agreed and the organization undertook to cover his farming expenses, in return for which all the produce would become the property of "Otzar Beit Din" and would be distributed in full accordance with Jewish law.

And then a major spell of cold weather gripped the Land of Israel for over 2 weeks.

Bananas don't like cold.

When bananas get hit with frost while still growing, they turn brown and become rock-solid hard.

The banana farmer knew he was in deep trouble when the relentless cold hadn't let up for over a week. As his orchard was some distance from where he lived, he hadn't seen the damage with his own eyes. His neighboring farmers, whose orchards bordered his, started to call him, complaining bitterly that their entire banana crop had been destroyed by the frost. He decided it was time to inspect the damage, no matter how painful it might be.

He drove up close to Tiveria (Tiberias) to inspect his orchard. Passing by his neighbors' orchards, one after another, he was overwhelmed by the damage. Not a single fruit had survived; no tree was spared. All the bananas were brown, hard as rock. He could only imagine how bad his trees must be. When he finally got to his orchard, he couldn't believe his eyes. Not one of his bananas was brown. It was as though his orchard was in a totally different place. His orchard bordered those of his neighbors, but not a single tree of his was struck by the frost.

It was as if a protective wall kept the damage away. At first he thought he was imagining it, but as he moved from one section of his orchard to another, he realized that "more than the farmer keeps the Shemita, the Shemita keeps the farmer".

He immediately called his contacts at Keren HaShvi'it and yelled into the phone, "Karah nes!, karah nes!" "There's been a miracle! There's been a miracle!"

A miraculous modern-day manifestation of "I will ordain My blessing for you in the sixth year..."

As a result of this miracle, his neighbors who previously refused to keep Shemita turned to the Keren and decided they were now ready to commit to Shemita observance.

"Very nice", I can hear you say, "but did everyone who kept Shemita experience a miracle? Did everyone walk away without the loss of a shekel?"

The Chazon Ish (Shevi'it 18:4) says that the Torah isn't guaranteeing here that everyone is going to prosper despite the restrictions of Shemita. Rather the farmers who observe these laws will have a general blessing. As always, and not just in the case of Shemita, the sins of the individuals can cause them to forfeit that blessing, as might also their neighbors' actions.

The Jewish People are one. What any one of us does affects every one of us.

### ***Hidden Miracles***

***"If you walk in My laws..." (26:3)***

The purpose of this world is to be factory to produce a product called "Olam Haba" — the World-to-Come.

That is our only target, and the mitzvot our only passport.

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from: Ohr Somayach <ohr@ohr.edu>

However, you can read the Torah from cover to cover and you won't find one specific promise about the reward for keeping the mitzvot in the next world. Promises of reward in this world abound. We are promised the rains in their time; the land will give its produce and the trees will bear fruit; there will be an abundance of food that we will eat to satiety. We will dwell securely in our Land. No one will walk down a dark street and be frightened. No one will worry about sending their children off on the bus in the morning. There will be abundance and peace.

Why is it that the Torah makes no open promises about the reward for keeping the mitzvot in the next world, but is replete with details of their reward in this existence?

All reward and punishment in this world is through hidden miracles. When a person eats a bacon-cheeseburger and dies prematurely, nobody knows that he died because he ate a bacon-cheeseburger. People die at his age even when they don't eat bacon-cheeseburgers. They die younger.

A person gives tzedaka and becomes rich. You don't see that he became rich because he gave tzedaka. There are plenty of rich people who don't give tzedaka and yet become rich by receiving an inheritance or winning the sweepstake. The hidden miracle is that a person who wasn't destined to become rich or wasn't supposed to die young, but because he gave tzedaka or because he ate the bacon-cheeseburger, G-d changed this person's destiny. It's miraculous, but it's hidden. It looks like nature, but if it were actually the work of nature, then nothing that a person did in this world could have any effect on himself. For a person is born under a certain mazal, a certain destiny, and without the intervention of an outside force, the hidden miracle, nothing that a person did, whether for good or bad, would have any repercussions in this world.

That's why the Torah speaks at great length about the outcome of the performance (or non-performance) of the mitzvot in this world. For it is truly miraculous that our actions should affect anything in this world, a world that, aside from these hidden miracles, is run by a system of mazal and nature.

However, as far as the next world is concerned, it's obvious that our actions will have repercussions there. The Torah doesn't need to stress the reward and punishment in that existence because it's obvious that people who engage in spiritual pursuits and serve G-d faithfully should receive spiritual rewards. But it is certainly not natural that people who are immersed in the work of the spirit, the study of Torah and the performance of mitzvot, should receive their reward in this world as well. Therefore, the Torah stresses the reward for keeping the mitzvot in this world, because that is something that no one could surmise without being told of its existence.

Source: Ramban on the Parsha and at the beginning of Parshat Va'era  
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**Orthodox Union / [www.ou.org](http://www.ou.org)  
Rabbi Weinreb's Parsha Column  
*Behar-Bechukotai: "Habit Power"***

Whenever my grandfather would visit us he would ask me to obtain the key for the local synagogue. As regular readers of this column know by now, my paternal grandfather was a man who utilized his every spare moment to study Torah. Rather than study at home, he preferred to study in a community beit midrash, or study hall, and so he would frequent the beit midrash of the local synagogue whenever possible. It was my task to make sure that he was able to enter the local shul when he visited our community.

When I delivered the key to him he would say, "Now I am assured that I will be able to emulate King David." At first, I had no idea what he was talking about. But then he explained this cryptic statement to me by teaching me a

comment of the Midrash on a verse in one of the two Torah portions that we read this week, Behar/Bechukotai (Leviticus 25:1-27:34).

The opening verses of the second of these twin parshiyot are usually translated thus: "If you follow my decrees and faithfully observe My commandments, I will grant your rains in their season, so that the earth shall yield its produce and the trees of the field their fruit". (Leviticus 26:3-4) We can understand why that first phrase is not translated literally, for if it were it would read: "If you walk in My decrees"! What would that mean? What might be the significance of "walking in God's decrees"?

Rashi, bothered by the Torah's choice of the word "walking", offers one approach to resolving the question. But in the Midrash Rabbah we find an alternative approach. The Midrash connects our phrase to a verse in Psalms, in which King David proclaims: "I have considered my ways, and have turned my feet to Your decrees" (Psalms 119:59). Upon which the Midrash puts these words into King David's mouth: "Master of the universe, each and every day I would consider attending such and such an event or going to such and such a place. But my feet would eventually lead me to synagogues or to study halls." This, concludes the Midrash, is David's intent when he proclaims, "I have turned my feet to Your decrees."

Over the generations, numerous scholars have written extensive commentaries upon the Midrash. One of them, the 19th century Rabbi David Luria, reminds us that Hillel the Elder made a very similar statement when he declared: "To the place I love, that is where my feet lead me" (Talmud Tractate Sukkah 53a), upon which the Talmudic sage Rabbi Yochanan commented, "A person's feet are his guarantors!"

A contemporary of Rabbi Luria, Chanoch Zundel, elaborates eloquently upon the passage in the Midrash in his fascinating work, Eitz Yoseph. He points out that the private thoughts and personal considerations of even a man like David would not have led him to spiritually exemplary deeds, to Torah study and prayer. Thus David confesses that when he planned his day, he had other intentions regarding his ultimate destinations, "other events and other places". However, his feet, which Rabbi Chanoch Zundel suggests refer to his physiological habits, his locomotive reflexes, carried him to where he really belonged, to the spiritual destination he unconsciously preferred.

Rabbi Chanoch Zundel helps convince us that his interpretation of this Midrashic passage is correct by pointing out that the Hebrew word for "habit" is *hergel*, which has as its root the Hebrew word for foot, *regel*. There is an important universal lesson here about the power of habit. If one consistently behaves in a certain way he establishes a pattern of behavior which becomes "hard-wired" into his nervous system. That "hard-wired" pattern becomes activated even when the person does not intend to activate it. This is why establishing a morally desirable pattern of behavior is so essential. In moments of temptation, or in moments of stress, when our conscious minds might not activate those desirable patterns, our nervous system kicks on, and those important patterns becomes activated without our conscious intention.

The great medieval author of the Sefer HaChinuch said it so succinctly and so well when he wrote: "Acharei ha'peulot nimshachim ha'levavot—after our actions do our hearts follow." Habits of action lay down the groundwork for our behavior and influence our emotions. He further suggests that habits even overpower our emotions when we would otherwise unwisely yield to those emotions.

One of my favorite American philosophers, who lived and wrote long after the various rabbinic sources which I have quoted heretofore, came to a very similar conclusion about the power of habit and its positive utility for making proper moral decisions. I refer to William James, whose text *The Principles of Psychology* remains so very relevant and timely despite being written in 1890.

The fourth chapter of James' book is entitled "Habit", and is often published as a separate essay in various anthologies of his works. He begins the chapter with this observation: "When we look at living creatures from an outward

point of view, one of the first things that strike us is that they are bundles of habits.”

James goes on to give a very impressive array of examples to demonstrate just how forceful habits can be. One such example is that “men grown old in prison have asked to be readmitted after being once set free.” They are so habituated to prison life that freedom is overwhelming for them.

But the greatest contribution of James’ remarkable essay is his insistence that we use the power of habit in our own education, and particularly in our moral education. He recommends that we “make our nervous system our ally instead of our enemy.”

He has some specific suggestions, some of which sound like quotations from a primer on mussar, on religious and ethical behavior: “Seize the very first possible opportunity to act on every resolution you make...”; “No matter how full a reservoir of maxims one may possess, and no matter how good one’s sentiments may be, if one has not taken advantage of every concrete opportunity to act, one’s character may remain entirely unaffected for the better...”; “there is no more contemptible type of human character than that of the nerveless sentimentalist and dreamer...who never does a manly concrete deed”.

James even goes so far as to recommend that one “do every day or two something for no other reason than that you would rather not do it” just to strengthen yourself “to stand like a tower when everything rocks around him”.

The wisdom of William James is consistent with the perspective of our Torah. If one’s feet are accustomed to walking in God’s statutes he will do so even when distracted by other challenges. This was the secret of my grandfather’s key. For him it was a concrete symbol of where his feet wanted to go, of his most deeply desired destination—the shul and the beit midrash. Our sages said it so well: Lo hamidrash hu ha’ikkar ela ha’maaseh. It is not theory which is paramount. It is action!

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from: Shabbat Shalom <shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org>

**Orthodox Union / www.ou.org**

**Britain's Former Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks**

***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 Israel follows God’s decrees and keeps His commands, there will be rain, the earth will yield its fruit, there will be peace, the people will flourish, they will have children, and the Divine presence will be in their midst. God will make them free. “I broke the bars of your yoke and enabled you to walk with heads held high.”

The other side of the equation, though, is terrifying: the curses that will befall the nation 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 ... 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 ... 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. (Lev. 26: 14-36)

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 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. Despite everything God will not break His covenant with the Jewish people. Collectively they will be eternal. They may suffer, but they will never be destroyed. They will undergo exile but eventually they will return.

Stated with the utmost drama, this 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 will 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 and 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 would be utterly dependent on moral considerations. If Israel stayed true to its mission, it would flourish. If it drifted from its vocation, it would suffer defeat after defeat.

Only one other nation 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 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.[1]

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. Spinoza argued just this. “This, then, was the object of the ceremonial law,” he wrote, “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.”[2] However, in this respect, Spinoza was wrong. Covenant theology is emphatically a politics of liberty.

What is happening in Vayikra 26 is an application to a nation as a whole of the proposition God spelled out to individuals at the beginning of human history:

“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.” (Gen. 4:6-7)

The choice – God 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 God – 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.

To stay free, a nation must worship something greater than itself, nothing less than God, together with 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 twentieth century to remind us of this truth.

In the face of suffering and loss, there are two fundamentally different questions an individual or nation 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 leads inescapably to 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, and it rests on the choice Moses was later to define in these words:

"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. (Deut. 30: 19)

One of the most profound contributions 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 God 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.

[1] John Schaar, *Legitimacy and the Modern State*, 291.

[2] Spinoza, *Theologico-Political Treatise*, ch. 5.

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks is a global religious leader, philosopher, the author of more than 25 books, and moral voice for our time. Until 1st September 2013 he served as Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth, having held the position for 22 years. To read more from Rabbi Sacks or to subscribe to his mailing list, please visit [www.rabbisacks.org](http://www.rabbisacks.org).

## by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky *A Separate Peace*

"If you will walk in my statutes, and heed my commandments ..." (Leviticus 33:3).

This week the Torah bestows its promise of blessing and peace to those who follow in the path of Torah. Rashi is bothered by the seeming redundancy of walking in statutes, and heeding commands. He explains that "walk in my statutes" refers to arduous Torah study, and "heed my commandments" refers to keeping the mitzvot.

And then there is peace. Hashem promises that if we adhere to the directives, "I will bring peace to the land" (ibid v. 6) In the same verse, the Torah also tells us that "a sword will not pass through your land." If there is peace, then obviously a sword will not pass through. What is the meaning of the redundancy? Once again, Rashi explains that the "sword passing through" is referring to a sword that is not directed against our people; rather it is a sword that is passing through on the way to another country. Thus the two types of peace.

But maybe there is a different type of peace; one that does not refer to guns and ammunition, but rather to a peace that is on another level.

Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein of B'nei Berak tells the story of Rav Eliezer Shach, the Ponovezer Rosh Yeshiva, of blessed memory.

Rav Shach once entered a shul and sat down in a seat towards the back, and, while waiting for the minyan to begin, Rav Shach began to study Torah. Suddenly a man approached him, hands on his hips, and began shouting at him.

"Don't you know that you are sitting in my seat?" the irate man yelled.

"Who are you to come here and just sit down, without asking anyone permission?"

Rav Shach quickly stood up and embraced the man. He hugged him lovingly as he begged the man for forgiveness. He agreed to the irate man's every point.

"I am so sorry for taking your seat even if it was for a few moments," he pleaded. Please forgive me. I must have absent-mindedly sat down there. Please forgive me.

The man was taken aback at the Rosh Yeshiva's humility, and immediately apologized for his rude behavior.

"After the davening, students of Rav Shach approached him and asked why he so readily accepted blame and begged forgiveness for what surely was not a misdeed. After all, why should he not be able to sit down in the seat. Rav Shach explained, "If Torah is all that one aspires to have, then everything else in this world, all the items one would normally squabble about has no significance. When one is immersed in Torah, a seat is meaningless, a place is meaningless. Surely a material object is not worth getting upset over, surely no less are they worth fighting over. Why shouldn't I apologize?" The Torah tells us a secret to peace in our community. If we toil in Torah, there will be peace in the land. The Torah is telling us that if we immerse ourselves in Torah then all the temporal objects that are the fulcrum of most fights are meaningless.

We think of peace as a concept that occurs between nations. However, we often forget that what we need is peace within our own community. A separate peace.

Good Shabbos

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky is the Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshiva Toras Chaim at South Shore and the author of the Parsha Parables series.

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Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz

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**Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz**

*Parshat Behar: One person for the other*

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Parsha Parables By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

**Drasha Parshas Behar-Bechukosai**

According to the Torah, utterances that offend others is forbidden no matter who they are.

In Parshat Behar, which we read this week, we find one of the greatest prohibitions in the Torah: The prohibition of wronging another person. Put simply, this prohibits us from offending any person, no matter who they are. The Torah phrases it as such: "And you shall not wrong, one man his fellow Jew, and you shall fear your God, for I am the Lord, your God." (Leviticus 25:17) The Babylonian Talmud discusses this prohibition at length and determines that any utterance that causes unpleasantness or offense to another is completely forbidden.

They felt so strongly about this prohibition that they declared the following: "He who humiliates another person in public – it is as though he has killed him.

"He who humiliates another person in public – has no part in the World to Come.

"Better that one throw oneself into a fiery furnace rather than whiten the face of [i.e., embarrass] one's friend in public." (Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Baba Metzi'a, daf 58-59) These directives are unprecedented among the commandments in the Torah. A man might just blurt out an insulting comment to a friend, and there are those who would not even take it to heart, but Judaism sees this as such a serious transgression that the sages of the Talmud state clearly: It would be better to fall into a furnace than to offend another person! Why did the sages feel so strongly about this prohibition? We have to delve deeply into this in order to understand this nowadays, when we live in a reality that makes it seem as though offending someone is completely permissible. We see public figures throw insults at one another, looking like gladiators hitting one another while the barbaric audience cheers them on.

The Internet, which opened the gateways of knowledge for humanity, also allows anyone to denigrate and harm others, sometimes anonymously. And these insults spread quickly and become unstoppable. We have to stop for a moment and think – Does this sort of behavior fit with Jewish moral codes? And the answer is a resounding No.

So, why is this prohibition considered so serious? To aid in our understanding, let us read what the son of Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin (end of the 18th century, the founder and rosh yeshiva of Volozhin in Russia) said about his father: "He would frequently criticize me for seeing that I do not sympathize with the sorrow of others, and this is what he would always tell me: 'Man was not created for himself, but to benefit others as much as his strength allows him to.'" (Introduction to the book Nefesh HaChayim – The Soul of Life) This is an interesting concept. Man was not created for his own benefit, but rather to benefit others. The source of this idea is in a verse in the Book of Genesis (1:27) that tell us that man was created "in G-d's image." Clearly, the reference is not to an "image" in the simplistic sense, since G-d has no body or image, but the reference is to a trait of both G-d and man.

What is this trait? What do we actually know about G-d? The answer that we know with certainty is that He created the entire world.

Therefore, the trait which characterizes man, for which he was created, is to benefit others, just as G-d benefits the world and all of creation. We now understand why Judaism looks so harshly upon a person who harms another, since he is not only performing an act which is "not nice," but he is desecrating the "image of G-d" within himself and is not fulfilling the main purpose for which he exists.

This is so significant that it would be better to fall into a furnace, definitely endangering one's life, rather than desecrate the "image of G-d" and harm another person.

If we adopt this concept and implement it in our lives, we will internalize the idea that we are not here for ourselves, but for others. By doing so, we will be privileged to fulfill our purpose as humans and in addition, our lives will be undoubtedly more serene, more comfortable and far more satisfying.

#### **Parshat Bechukotai: A vessel for blessings**

Parshat Bechukotai opens with a detailed list of promises slated to be fulfilled when Am Yisrael goes in the path of Torah and keeps the commandments.

Most of the promises appearing in this list deal with economic welfare, the quiet and serene life of a nation living in its land, safe from its various enemies. But among the promises is a short one that is of deep significance: "And I will grant peace in the Land." (Leviticus 26:6) The Ramban (Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman, one of the greatest sages in Spain in the 13th century), claimed that these words do not refer to peace between a nation and its enemies, but rather to an inner peace among the various segments of the nation. This is what he wrote: "There will be peace among you, and you will not fight one man with his brother."

This promise differs from the others in the list in which it appears since it deals with a societal situation that is not dependent on a flourishing economy or national-military security. On the other hand, it is the pinnacle of all the promises, since what value would financial prosperity have in a "dog eat dog" world? When we examine this, we see that this promise incorporates another one, which is no less significant.

WHEN IS peace necessary? When people agree on the goals they wish to achieve, the need for peace is less obvious. But when people disagree, when different people work toward different objectives, that is when the need for peace is manifest and valued.

When the Torah promises us peace, it does not mean that we will live in a situation in which peace is a given. It is referring to a reality in which peace is not a given, but despite our differences, we will all be able to live in peace.

How is this possible? Can true peace exist between people who have different opinions and actions? There is a saying attributed to Rabbi Nachman of Breslov (one of the greatest hassidic leaders, from Ukraine, at the beginning of the 19th century): "The greater the open-mindedness – the greater the peace."

Why is peace dependent on open-mindedness? Because this is the secret that enables peace among different people. When we understand that despite the differences in opinion, we must open our minds and make space also for opinions opposed to our own, that is true peace. If our minds are open enough to appreciate the other who disagrees with us, then we have reached a state when peace is indeed in our midst.

Therefore, the Torah's promise "And I will grant peace in the land" conceals within it another promise, that we will be worthy of peace, that we will have minds that are open and deep enough to live peacefully with those of different opinions and attitudes.

Our sources say the following about peace: "The Blessed be He did not find a vessel to hold blessings for Israel other than peace, as it says, 'May G-d give strength to His people; May G-d bless His nation with peace.'" (Mishna, Masechet Otkzin, 3rd chapter) The definition of peace as a "vessel for blessing" expresses the special attitude that the Jewish nation, throughout the generations, has had regarding peace.

Peace that exists between contrasts, between those of different opinions, is the yearned-for peace, the peace that is a "vessel for blessing."

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

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#### **Rav Kook List**

##### **Rav Kook on the Torah Portion**

##### ***The Kotel - Stones with Hearts***

What is the significance of the Kotel? Why do Jews gather from around the world to pour out their hearts facing this ancient stone wall?

In 1937, Rav Tzvi Yehudah Kook published an article entitled "Mei'achar Kotleinu" (Behind our Wall). The rabbi chose a title which evokes God's constant presence at the Kotel:

"Behold, [my Beloved] is standing behind our wall, looking from the windows, peering from the lattices." (Song of Songs 2:9)

Rav Tzvi Yehudah objected to the term Wailing Wall. He felt that this is a superficial description of the Kotel as a place of mourning and inconsolable loss. Even worse, this name suggests the helplessness of a weak and stateless nation.

More appropriate, he felt, is the name Kotel HaMa'aravi, the Western Wall.

This term describes the Kotel as a holy remnant of the Second Temple complex (and, in fact, the Temple Mount wall which was located closest to the Holy of Holies). It recalls the ancient tradition that "the Shekhinah has never left the Western Wall," and denotes the Kotel as a symbol of the eternal nature of Israel, despite centuries of exile and persecution. Its unmoving stones are testimony that the Jewish people will return to their land and lofty heritage.

When originally published, the article was mistakenly attributed to Rav Kook. The article was later printed in a collection of Rav Tzvi Yehudah Kook's writings called LeNetivot Yisrael. Below is a translation of parts of the article, as well as the popular song that it would inspire forty years later.

##### ***Behind our Wall, by Rav Tzvi Yehudah Kook***

Secure and invincible with its Divine strength, the Kotel holds its own - throughout the generations of change, transformations and vicissitudes, the horrors and the shocks, which visited the land and its inhabitants. The Kotel is in them and with them.

Even if the disgrace of ruin conceals its beauty, and signs of destruction are displayed prominently over it, and clouds of desolation cast shadows over its radiance; even if it is hidden behind a thicket of dark and squalid alleys, as it is shoved aside in the cruelty of its neighbors, surrounding it from all sides, trying to invade its borders, to suppress and consume its legacy. Nonetheless,

like a stone fortress, it stands guard, without moving and without allowing its inner dignity to be sullied. It remains pure and exalted in the strength of its very essence...

For it is a remnant of the holy and precious, of the Divine abode. In the wonderful quality of its very existence, it is a witness to world events and the millennia of human history.

יש אבנים ויש אבנים. יש אבני דומה, ויש אבנים-לבבות

There are hearts and there are hearts. There are human hearts, and there are hearts of stone.

יש אבנים ויש אבנים. יש אבני דומה, ויש אבנים-לבבות

There are stones and there are stones. There are silent stones, and there are stones which are hearts.

These stones, remnants of our dwelling on high, retain their holiness even in desolation (Megillah 3:3), for the Shekhinah has never left the Western Wall (Tanhuma Shemot 10).... These stones are our hearts!

Each of us knows that this wall, for all of its somber simplicity and signs of ruin and exile, is not a Wailing Wall for us, as it is called by strangers and foreigners. For us, it is a wealth of life, a hidden treasure of light and strength, guarded and secured by our tears.

The healthy Jewish eye does not see in the Kotel a symbol of our nation's ruin, destruction and degeneration. On the contrary, we see the wall, in the hidden strength and power of its existence, still standing - even after they fell and when they fell - as it raises itself up and reaches out with Divine strength to eternal redemption.

The Kotel by Yossi Gamzu

After the Kotel's liberation in the Six-Day War, Israeli lyricist Yossi Gamzu composed a song which quickly became an Israeli classic - HaKotel. Gamzu utilized imagery from Rav Tzvi Yehudah Kook's 1937 article. He even dedicated one stanza to Rav Tzvi Yehudah, accurately describing the rabbi's lofty elation in the historical event, as well as his profound love for the Jewish soldiers who fought in the war.

The Kotel

The Kotel, moss and sadness; the Kotel, lead and blood.

There are people with a heart of stone; and there are stones with a human heart. ...

Together with us, facing the Kotel, stands an elderly rabbi, in prayer.

He said, Fortunate are we, that we all merited this!

Then he remembered, But not all.

He stood with glistening tears. Alone, among the dozens of soldiers.

He said, Under your khaki uniforms, in fact - you are all holy kohanim and Levites.

(Stories from the Land of Israel. LeNetivot Yisrael, vol. I, pp. 22-25 )

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### **The Hebrew Calendar and its Missing Years- Part One by Reuven Herzog ('13) and Benjy Koslowe ('13)**

Kol Torah is enormously proud to present a landmark article written by TABC alumni Reuven Herzog '13 and Benjy Koslowe '13, themselves former Kol Torah editors-in-chief. This article was originally delivered as a Shiur at TABC's summer of 2014 Tanach Kollel.

The article presents an intriguing solution to a very well-known issue regarding the compatibility of Chazal's Seder Olam and the commonly accepted historic chronology. Although dozens of articles address this issue, we believe that this article is the best article written on this subject published to date.

This article is **based on a series of Shiurim given by Rav Menachem Leibtag** at Yeshivat Har Etzion.

I. Introduction

The Hebrew calendar counts the current year as 5775 Anno Mundi[1]. However, many adherents to this calendar may not realize that this year stems from Seder Olam Rabbah, a late Tannaitic work. Detailing important dates and years in Jewish history, Seder Olam establishes a timeline from Adam HaRishon to the end of the Bar Kochba revolt, and it became the ubiquitous dating convention in the Jewish community around the turn of the second millennium CE.

A challenge regarding the Hebrew calendar is that the year 5775 may not be so precise. Seder Olam records that the time between the destructions of the two Batei Mikdash lasted 490 years. However, secular history records that the Churban of the first Beit HaMikdash took place in 586 BCE, and that the Churban of the second Beit HaMikdash occurred in 70 CE; this leaves us with a period of 655 years[2]. Thus, there is a discrepancy of 165 years between Seder Olam and secular history!

The "missing years" are a puzzling element of the Jewish Mesorah. They beg the question of what happened to them and whether Seder Olam was intended to be a definitive history or something else entirely.

In this article, we intend to follow Seder Olam's chronology and explain how it reaches its conclusions, using an internally consistent methodology. Beyond this, we hope to demonstrate how Seder Olam's inconsistency with outside sources is not a flaw; rather, it serves a tremendous purpose in the Rabbinic period.

## II. Seder Olam's Count

Seder Olam Rabbah is a Tannaitic work generally attributed to the mid-2nd century Tanna Rabi Yosi ben Chalafta. A Midrashic commentary on Jewish history, it chronicles and exegetes the stories of Tanach and a little beyond, using the historical narratives as a springboard for Chazal's teachings and messages, similar to other Midreshei Aggadah. In fact, Seder Olam can be thought of as similar to the Midrash Rabbah collection, a "History Rabbah[3]," in that its goal is not to explicitly comment on historical facts, but rather to use stories as an educational tool.

In building its timeline, Seder Olam uses two primary sources, both stemming from the Tanach. The first and dominant source is explicit references from the books of Tanach to specific years and periods of time, combined via simple arithmetic intuition. These references are plentiful and clear enough to write the timeline almost entirely, from Adam HaRishon to the Churban of the first Beit HaMikdash. (The dating of Malchut Yehudah is slightly cloudier; we will deal with this later.) The second source is implicit references and inferences used to fill in the gaps where Tanach is more ambiguous. These are primarily used in the works post-Churban HaBayit, where dates of certain events are given, but there are no large blocks of time recorded.

### II-A. From Adam HaRishon until the Beit HaMikdash's Destruction

The first section of the timeline is incredibly easy to construct, taken almost directly from lists found in Sefer BeReishit. After the conclusion of the Gan Eden narratives there is a list of Adam's descendants, including how long they lived, and more significantly how old they were when the next child on the list was born. As an example (BeReishit 5:12-14):

"VaYeichi Keinan Shiv'im Shanah VaYoled Et Mahalaleil. VaYeichi Keinan Acharei Holido Et Mahalaleil Arba'im Shanah UShemoneh Mei'ot Shanah VaYoled Banim UVanot. VaYihyu Kol Yemei Keinan Eser Shananim UTsha Mei'ot Shanah VaYamot."

"And Keinan lived 70 years, and he gave birth to Mahalaleil. And Keinan lived 840 years after giving birth to Mahalaleil, and he gave birth to many children. And all the days of Keinan were 910 years, and he died."

The only relevant information for us in this paragraph is how long Keinan lived before the birth of his son; everything afterwards is overlap and therefore does not help to create a contiguous timeline.

Such Pesukim are repeated almost verbatim for the entire line of Adam to Noach, ten generations in all (plus the birth of Noach's children, the eleventh generation). The result of this timeline is a simple calculation of dates for when each person was born:

Name	Father's age at time of birth	Year of birth
Adam	N/A	0
Sheit	130	130
Enosh	105	235
Keinan	90	325
Mahalaleil	70	395
Yered	65	460
Chanoch	162	622
Metushelah	65	687
Lemech	187	874
Noach	182	1056

A very similar list exists in Perek 11, after the Mabul and Migdal Bavel stories, listing the generations from Sheim to Avraham:

Name	Father's age at time of birth	Year of birth
Sheim[4]	502	1558
Arpachshad	100	1658
Shelach	35	1693
Eiver	30	1723
Peleg	34	1757
Re'u	30	1787
Serug	32	1819
Nachor	30	1849
Terach	29	1878
Avraham[5]	70	1948

After Avraham's birth, the points of reference in the Torah are more spread out, and often these references describe large blocks of time rather than individual lifespans. The Torah informs us that Avraham was 100 years old when Yitzchak was born (21:5). After Yitzchak's birth, there are 400 years until Yetziat Mitzrayim. This is based on *Seder Olam's* derivation from the Berit Bein HaBetarim that the 400 years of Avraham's descendants dwelling in a foreign country begin with the birth of Yitzchak[6]. Thus, Yetziat Mitzrayim took place in year 2448 of *Seder Olam*.

The next block of time is from Yetziat Mitzrayim until the start of construction of the first Beit HaMikdash, a period Sefer Melachim informs us was 480 years (Melachim I 6:1). We can therefore establish that the Beit HaMikdash began its time in year 2928 of *Seder Olam*.

In order to calculate the duration of the first Beit HaMikdash, Sefer Melachim records the length of each king's reign. Adding up the reigns of the kings from Shlomo – in whose fourth year as king the Beit HaMikdash's existence began – to Tzidkiyahu – in whose reign it was destroyed – we have

a total of 433 years[7]. However, because the dating system then was focused on the king and not on an absolute, continuous calendar (as we mentioned above), the final partial year of a king's rule was counted as a full year, and the rest of that year was also considered to be a full year for the next king. Therefore, we can conclude that there was an extra year of overlap recorded for each king. Accounting for the 19 rulers and therefore 19 years of overlap, our total reduces to 414 years. We also need to remember that construction began in the fourth year of Shlomo's reign. We therefore remove four years to give the final count of 410 years for which the first Beit HaMikdash stood. Thus, the Beit HaMikdash was destroyed in year 3338.

Name	Length of Reign	Start of Reign[8]
Shlomo	40	2924
<i>Binyan Bayit Rishon 2928</i>		
Rechav'am	17	2963
Aviyam	3	2979
Asa	41	2981
Yehoshafat	25	3021
Yehoram	8	3045
Achazyah	1	3052
Atalyah	6	3052
Yeho'ash	40	3057
Amatzyah	29	3096
Uziah/Azaryah	52	3124
Yotam	16	3175
Achaz	16	3190
Chizkiyahu	29	3205
Menasheh	55	3233
Amon	2	3287
Yoshiyahu	31	3288
Yeho'achaz	3 months	3318
Yehoyakim	11	3318
Yehoyachin	3 months	3328
Tzidkiyahu	11	3328
(Total)	433 (including overlap)	3338

#### II-B. Galut Bavel and the Second Beit HaMikdash

After the Beit HaMikdash's destruction, the records become much less comprehensive. There is no book that details a continuous history or provides dates in a larger context. All of the post-Churban Sifrei Tanach (like many of their earlier counterparts) give exclusively regnal dates.

Nothing informs us how long a king ruled, or even who directly succeeded him.

When the second Beit HaMikdash begins to be built in the second year of the Persian king Daryavesh, Zecharyah retrospectively references a period of 70 years (Zecharyah 1:12). This refers to the destruction of the Beit HaMikdash and Yerushalayim and the subsequent exile (with no mention of Babylonian rule, as this prophecy comes many years after the Babylonian empire fell)<sup>[9]</sup>. Therefore, the second year of Daryavesh and the beginning of the construction of the second Beit HaMikdash was in year  $3338+70=3408$  of *Seder Olam*. Construction took four years (Ezra 6:15), finishing in Daryavesh's sixth year, year 3412.

From this point on everything becomes much murkier. There are no "anchor dates" like in Yirmiyahu 25<sup>[10]</sup>. The few dates mentioned after the construction of the second Beit HaMikdash are only in reference to the king of the time, and we do not even know for sure the order of succession, much less for how long each Persian king ruled.

The latest date recorded in Tanach about Daryavesh is his sixth year, the year in which the second Beit HaMikdash was completed. The next date we have is that of Ezra's Aliyah to Eretz Yisrael, in the seventh year of king Artachshasta (Ezra 7:7). *Seder Olam* assumes that these two names refer to the same king, so these two events are only one year apart<sup>[11]</sup>. The last reference we have to Daryavesh/Artachshasta is during the governorship of Nechemyah, in his 32<sup>nd</sup> year (Nechemyah Perek 12). This can be calculated to be year 3438 of *Seder Olam*.

This is the latest concrete date that can be found in Tanach. However, a hint to later events can be found in a vision of Daniel. In Perakim 10 and 11, in the third year of Koresh<sup>[12]</sup>, Daniel receives a long, prophetic, colorful, and obscure description of much of the future political history from an angel. At the beginning of the history the angel states, "*Hinei Od Sheloshah Melachim Omedim LeParas*," "Behold, three more kings will stand for Persia" (Daniel 11:2); the fourth of the line<sup>[13]</sup> will be tremendously rich, and he will be conquered by an extremely powerful king of Greece<sup>[14]</sup>. *Seder Olam* assumes this king to be Alexander the Great, and thus the king succeeding Daryavesh/Artachshasta is Alexander. In addition, *Seder Olam* twice references that the Persians ruled over Israel for 52 years, which leads to the deduction that Daryavesh/Artachshasta ruled for 36 years. (This extra time is hinted at in Sefer Nechemyah, where Nechemyah mentions that he was in Persia during Artachshasta's 32<sup>nd</sup> year, and he took leave to return to Israel after a long period of time (Nechemyah 13:6).) Koresh took control in 3390; hence, Alexander's reign over the Persian Empire begins in year 3442 of *Seder Olam*.

*Seder Olam* follows Alexander's reign with a summary of the rulership until the Second Beit HaMikdash's destruction (and then to the Bar Kochba (alt. Ben Koziba) Revolt) in a succinct teaching of Rabi Yosi<sup>[15]</sup>: 34 years of Persian rule during the existence of the Beit HaMikdash, 180 years of Greek rule, 103 years of the Chashmona'i dynasty, and 103 years of the Herodian dynasty – totaling 420 years. Bar Kochba's rebellion was 52 years later.

In the second installment of this essay, we will bring light to issues that arise when comparing *Seder Olam*'s account of Bayit Sheini chronology with the conventional account of history. We will then hopefully explain how *Seder Olam*'s account consistently employs the methodology of Chazal to successfully arrive at its conclusions, regardless of outside chronologies.

[1] Lit: Year After Creation. This title is slightly misleading, as *Seder Olam* begins its chronology with Adam HaRishon and makes no mention of Beri'at HaOlam.

[2] The Gregorian calendar does not include a year 0; year 1 BCE is succeeded immediately by year 1 CE.

[3] Though this would be an apt title for the work, its real title does not denote any connection. The "Rabbah" suffix merely means "big," distinguishing it from a later chronological work also titled *Seder Olam* (*Zuta*).

[4] The Pesukim are not entirely clear here, stating only that Noah was 500 years old when he gave birth to Sheim, Cham, and Yefet. However, in the list from Sheim to Avraham, Arpachshad is stated as being born when Sheim was 100 years old, two years after the Mabul (11:10); therefore, we can deduce that Sheim was born 98 years before the Mabul. The Mabul is said to have been when Noah was 600 years old (7:6), in year 1656; thus, Sheim was born in year 1558.

[5] BeReishit 11:27 states that Terach was 70 years old when he gave birth to Avraham, Nachor, and Haran. It is assumed that Avraham was the oldest brother.

[6] This Derashah is based on the usage of the word "Zera," offspring, in the Berit (15:13): "*Yado'a Teida Ki Geir Yihyeh Zar'acha BeEretz Lo Lahem VaAvadum Velnu Otam Arba Mei'ot Shanah*," "Know well that your offspring will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and they will enslave them and torture them four hundred years." This "Zera" is identified by *Seder Olam* to match with the Pasuk (21:12), "*Ki VeYitzchak Yikarei Lecha Zara*," "For in Yitzchak offspring will be called for you."

[7] Yeho'achaz and Yehoyachin each ruled for three months, and are not even given credit for an entire year.

[8] The chronology in this table is based on a simple read of Sefer Melachim. The chronology is actually more complicated, but this is beyond the scope of this paper. For further reading, see Edwin Thiele's *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings* (1st ed.; New York: Macmillan, 1951).

[9] Zecharyah's reference is not explicitly about the Beit HaMikdash's destruction, but from context it is clear that he is referring to the destruction of the Temple, Yerushalayim, and all of Yehudah.

[10] See section IV (*Editor's Note*: This will appear in next week's installment).

[11] *Seder Olam* uses the ambiguous language of "Hu Koresh Hu Daryavesh Hu Artachshasta" to show that sometimes multiple names refer to the same king. The Gra explains this specific reference to be that Daryavesh is named as Koresh, the "Meshiach Hashem," by Yeshayahu; Daryavesh is awarded these extra titles because he rebuilt the Beit HaMikdash. (This association of Koresh and Daryavesh might be another element of Chazal's "hiding" of the disappointing Shivat Tziyon-era Navi at the end of Sefer Yeshayahu. By identifying "Koresh," who is prophesied to rebuild the Beit HaMikdash, as Daryavesh, who actually did, the author removes the problem of a false prophecy. See section V-B for a further explanation of the "hidden Navi.")

Interestingly, the Gra writes that there were three separate kings of Persia: Koresh, Daryavesh, and Artachshasta. However, he makes no mention of Achashveirosh, whom *Seder Olam* explicitly includes, and makes no attempt to identify him with one of the three aforementioned kings! Perhaps the Gra means only that all three of these kings, though Midrashically identified as one by *Seder Olam*, are separate rulers in their own right, in addition to Achashveirosh. This would pose a problem, though, with Daniel's vision (found in Perakim 10-11 of Sefer Daniel) of the four Persian kings (including Daryavesh HaMadi).

[12] The vision begins in Perek 10 and continues in Perek 11, according to the explanation of Da'at Mikra.

[13] Presumably this includes a king before Koresh, so the fourth king in total is the third remaining. Perhaps this earlier king refers to Daryavesh HaMadi, who conquered Bavel for Persia. (Daryavesh HaMadi's identity itself is very unclear; perhaps this is a reference to the general Gobryas who governed over Bavel for a few weeks after conquering it.) The result is that the four kings are Daryavesh HaMadi, Koresh, Achashveirosh, and Daryavesh/Artachshasta.

[14] A similar vision, though less detailed, can be found in Perek 8 of Daniel. *Seder Olam* cites Pesukim from both visions.

[15] The fact that this history is entirely Tannaitic and not derived from Tanach is incredibly significant. After the mention of Alexander, *Seder Olam* writes, "*Ad Kan Hayu Nevi'im Mitnab'im BeRuach HaKodesh; MiKan VeEilach Hat Oznecha UShma Divrei Chachamim*," "Until here Nevi'im would prophesize with Divine spirit; from here and onward listen to the words of the Sages." This marks the end of the period of Nevu'ah and a monumental transition in the nature of Judaism. The short section following even has the feel of an appendix to the primary history, that which is relevant to Tanach.