

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

In this week's prophetic portion, Jeremiah prophesied about the destruction of the First Temple. God commands Jeremiah to leave Jerusalem and travel to Anatot to buy a field from his cousin Chananel (Jeremiah 32).

It can be suggested that when God told Jeremiah the Temple was doomed, Jeremiah clung on to the city. While he knew the word of God was true, his love for the Temple was so great that he felt that he did not want to leave. Part of him may have felt that by remaining nearby, he would be able to infuse his very life, his very spirit, his very breath, into the Temple to keep it standing.

Jeremiah obeyed God's word and leaves to buy a field. This truly was an act of faith for it showed that even in the midst of doom, one must always believe that the Jewish people will prevail. Jeremiah certainly did what he knew he had to do. Still, by leaving Jerusalem, he broke the umbilical cord between himself and the Temple, and the Temple was destroyed.

This interpretation was offered by Rav Yosef Dov ha-Levi Soloveitchik after the death of his wife Tonya. He explained how the circumstances of his wife's death corresponded to the Jeremiah story.

The Rav often spoke of his wife in the most romantic terms. He pointed out that she was his bayit, his home, his Temple. When doctors told the Rav that Tonya was terminally ill, he knew the prognosis was bleak. But like Jeremiah, he felt if he remained with her constantly he could keep her alive and infuse part of his being into her.

And so it was. For months, the Rav remained at his wife's side. He prayed, studied, and conducted his business there. One day, Tonya urged him to travel to New York to finalize a contribution made by a generous philanthropist to Yeshiva University, Rav Soloveitchik's yeshiva. The Rav hesitated, but in the end, the doctors assured him that Tonya was not in danger that day. He flew to New York and was successful in securing the gift. As he stepped from the plane in Boston, he was notified that Tonya had lapsed into a coma. Entering his wife's hospital room, the Rav found her unconscious. A short time later Tonya Soloveitchik died.

While it is true that none of us has the power to keep alive everything we love forever, our physical

presence sometimes has the ability to comfort and heal. Staying close to the people and places we cherish helps infuse them with life. This Shabbat let us remain close to those we love. Let's resolve to connect ourselves powerfully to Eretz Yisrael and Jerusalem. © 2005 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA

THE SALANT FOUNDATION

The Wisdom of Personal Growth

by Rabbi Zvi Miller

The Torah (Vayikra 23:22) instructs us to leave some produce from the harvest of our fields for the poor members of our community. Rashi points out that this passage is placed in the middle of the chapter of festivals. This teaches us that if one gives these gifts to the poor-it is regarded as if he had built the Temple and brought his offerings.

However, the Temple service for the festivals pertains to the Mitzvoth "between man and Hashem". Whereas, leaving gifts over for the poor pertains to the Mitzvoth "between man and his fellow". Hence, we must explain how giving gifts to the poor, is equivalent to building the Temple and bringing his offerings.

The root of all Mitzvoth is sensitivity. In the Mitzvoth between man and his fellow, it is the care and compassion that inspires us to help our fellow man. In the Mitzvoth between man and Hashem, it is the desire to be pleasing to Hashem that awakens our Divine service.

Moreover, when one bestows kindness upon the Creations of Hashem, he loves and serves Hashem. This is so because Hashem-the Creator of all life-wants nothing more than His children to coexist in love, harmony, and peace.

After one has worked with the sweat of his brow to till his soil and labored from dawn to dusk to raise a crop from the earth-it is not easy to give part of his produce to people that he may not even know. Thus, when one empathizes with and gives gifts of his harvest to the poor he has overcome his nature.

Hashem values the effort that he made to look beyond his own needs and relinquish his desires. Sensitizing and softening one's heart to others is the essence of Divine Service. Therefore, the Temple service is a service of love, dedication, and joy.

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When he develops those precious virtues and gives to the poor, he has awakened the 'Image of HaShem' within himself. There is no greater Divine Service than filling his heart with compassion and care for others-tantamount to building the Temple and bringing his offerings.

Implement: As you do a kind act-envison yourself placing a brick in the Temple.

In ancient days, each family in Eretz Yisrael was awarded a parcel of land. This ancestral heritage was their eternal possession. Thus, even if someone became impoverished and was forced to sell his land-notwithstanding- it reverts to the original owner in the Jubilee year.

Moreover, the Torah (Vayikra 25:25) instructs the relatives of the impoverished seller to redeem the land and return it to its rightful owner. The purchaser is required to sell back the land whenever the family is in a position to reimburse him.

What happens if a man has no relatives to help him buy back his land? We would assume that he must wait for the Jubilee year. Yet, the Torah (Vayikra 25:26) states, "If a man will have no redeemer; but his means will suffice and he acquires enough for its redemption... then he pays the purchaser... and he shall return to his ancestral heritage."

A person who had to sell off his land should not despair if he has no relatives to bail him out. Eventually, he will have the sufficient funds to regain his property. Hashem will send him the means so that he, himself, will be able to redeem the land.

We often are discouraged because we feel we lack certain advantages that other people seem to have. We tell ourselves, "If I only had the connections that that guy has...." Or we think, "If I only had wealthy relatives to help me start a business..."

The truth is we are never alone. We have the most loving Father-the Master of all power and wealth-that helps us twenty-four hours a day. No matter what situation we find ourselves in-we can trust and pray to Him.

He will help us and redeem in the most wondrous of ways-the deliverance of Hashem comes as quickly as a blink of the eye. Just as Hashem will help an impoverished person find funds to buy back his land, so too, He will send us help from Heaven. Hashem is there beside you-He will never abandon you.

Implement: Say: "HaShem, You are near me. Help me HaShem." [Based on The Chofetz Chaim on the Torah, BeHar] © 2005 Rabbi Z. Miller & The Salant Foundation

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

The first Rashi in our Parsha is one of the most well known, as his question (quoting the Sifra) of "what connection does the Sabbatical year have with Mt Sinai?" has become part of the vernacular in religious circles, meaning "what does one thing have to do with another?" Yet, since the very next line is "aren't all the commandments [originally] said at Sinai," we see that there is a strong connection between every mitzvah and Sinai. Rashi's question (and the Sifra's) is therefore not "what does one have in common with the other," but rather "what is the unique connection between Shemittah (the Sabbatical year) and Sinai that warrants mentioning it here more than by any other mitzvah."

It would also seem that the question is not why "Mt. Sinai" is mentioned here, as the entire book of Vayikra up until this point was taught in the "Tent of Meeting," the Mishkan that the nation built to enable G-d's presence to dwell among them. As the rest of Vayikra (Behar and Bechukosai) was taught earlier - at Mt. Sinai - the Torah has to indicate this difference, and tell us that the commandments described from this point on were taught at Sinai, and not in the Mishkan. The question is specifically about Shemittah; why was this the first commandment taught after the location switch, therefore juxtaposing Shemittah and Sinai. After all, every commandment was taught at Sinai - why single Shemittah out?

The wording of the question bears this out as well. The Sifra does not ask what reason there was for putting the words "Mt. Sinai" at the beginning of the mitzvah regarding Shemittah. Instead, the question reads, "What is Shemittah doing next to Mt. Sinai," i.e. what is special about Shemittah that it is the mitzvah chosen to be taught in close proximity to (the necessary clarification of the location being) Mt. Sinai?

However, if this is the question, how does the supplied answer address this issue? The Sifra's answer is that just as we see that all of Shemittah - the general law and its details - was taught at Sinai, the same is

true for every mitzvah - that the general concept and the full explanation of it were all given over at Sinai. But whichever mitzvah the Torah chose to teach first would indicate the same thing, provided its full details were taught here as well. For example, the last verse in our Parsha mentions keeping the Sabbath. Had it been taught first, along with its full explanation, we could have just as easily said that the same way it was taught fully at Sinai, so too every mitzvah was taught fully at Sinai. If the question is about the uniqueness of the connection between Shemithah and Sinai, having this full description taught there does not answer the question - as in the end every mitzvah has this quality. And if this is the lesson to be learned (and how we learn it), why bother phrasing it as a question in the first place? Just come right out and say it: just as this mitzvah was taught fully at Sinai, so too was every mitzvah. How does putting it in the form of a question - one that never really gets answered - get the point across better?

After quoting the Sifra, Rashi adds some words of explanation to explain what the Sifra means, pointing out that when Moshe repeated the laws of the Torah to the next generation before he died (in Sefer Devarim), he did not teach them the laws of not working the land in the seventh year (i.e. Shemithah). Although our above question can be extended here as well (not repeating whichever mitzvah was taught first in our Parsha with the other mitzvos taught to the next generation), by adding this element to the mix, Rashi is telling us why Shemithah was the mitzvah chosen to be placed next to the words "Mt. Sinai."

Where was Shemithah kept? In the Land of Israel. Until the nation got there, though, these laws had no practical application. Numerous laws were taught at the Plains of Moav, shortly before they entered the land. It would seem more appropriate to teach the laws of Shemithah there too, as they would have to be implemented soon after. Why would the Torah avoid teaching them to us there, choosing instead to tell us about them at Mt. Sinai? This may have been the question the Sifra is asking: "What connection is there between Shemithah and Mt. Sinai that these laws were fully explained by Sinai, rather than at the seemingly more appropriate Plains of Moav, to the generation that would keep it?" The Sifra answers that by teaching us these laws here, we see that every mitzvah - even those that were not yet relevant - was taught in its entirety at Sinai. It is precisely because the laws of Shemithah were less relevant at Sinai that teaching us them there indicates that all the other mitzvos were taught there too. And if we see that they were taught there in their entirety, then all the other mitzvos must have been taught there in their entirety as well.

According to Rabbi Akiva (whose opinion this Sifra is following- see Sotah 37b), all of the mitzvos-their general concept along with the complete explanation - were taught at Sinai, repeated in the Mishkan, and taught for a third time by the Plains of

Moav. The Torah doesn't record the full lessons from each of these three, allowing us to learn all of their details from the parts of each lesson that are included. By recording the full Shemithah lesson from Mt. Sinai (and leaving out the third one completely), the Torah is showing us that even those mitzvos that weren't recorded as being fully explained at Sinai were in fact taught there - in their entirety. © 2005 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“You shall count for yourself seven cycles of sabbatical years, seven years, seven times; the years of the seven cycles of sabbatical years shall be for you forty nine years.... you shall sanctify the fiftieth year and proclaim freedom throughout the land for all its inhabitants.... it shall be a Jubilee year for you...." (Leviticus 25:8-13)

The Biblical portions in the Book of Leviticus-Tazria, Metzora, Emor and Behar-seem to be almost fixated on the commandment to count, the commandment of sefirah. Barely two chapters ago we were commanded, "And you shall count for yourselves-from the day following the rest day (the first day of the festival of Passover), from the day when you bring the Omer of the waving- seven weeks.... until the day after the seventh week you shall count fifty days...." (Leviticus 33:15,16); the Bible has commanded us to count each day of the seven weeks between the Festivals of Passover and Shavuot, until the fiftieth day. And now in this week's portion of Behar the Bible is commanding us to count the seven cycles of the sabbatical years (seven times seven or forty nine years) until the fiftieth year, the Jubilee year. Clearly, there is a significant parallel between these two commandments of counting. Similarly, both men and women (zav and zavah as well as nidah) are commanded to count seven days, after which-on the eighth day they undergo ritual immersion and purity. All of these "countings" must in some way be related.

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

Passover is therefore our freedom from Egypt and slavery; Shavuot is our entry into Israel and Jerusalem, replete with the Holy Temple. This idea is

even further deepened by the text of the Haggadah during the Passover Seder. The Mishnah (in Arvei Pesachim) teaches that the central part of our retelling of the exodus from Egypt is an explication of the very verses which the individual must read when he brings the first fruits; we are to explicate around the Seder table "from 'Arami oved Avi' (An Aramean tried to destroy my forefather) until the end of that portion. (Deut. 26:5-10)" However, we do not explicate the entire speech; the Haggadah neglects to include the last two verses of the declaration of the one who brings the first fruits. The Haggadah quotes:

"An Aramean tried to destroy my forefather; he descended to Egypt...became great, strong and numerous. The Egyptians... afflicted us;...we cried out to the Lord our G-d who heard our voice, saw our affliction, and took us out of Egypt with a strong hand... with signs and with wonders." (Deut. 26:5-8) However, the final two verses, "He brought us to this place, and He gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey; and now behold I have bought the first fruit of the earth that you have given me O' Lord." (Ibid 26:9,10), are deleted by the author of the Haggadah.

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

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

This march from national freedom from Egyptian slavery to security in our own land from which we must realize our mission to bring peace to the world is expressed by counting or sefira. The Hebrew spr also means to tell, to recount, to clarify-which is the real commandment of the Seder night of sipur yetziat mitzraim. The same root spr also appears in the biblical description of the throne of the Divine at the time of the revelation at Sinai, which is like "the white of the

sapphire (sappir) and the purity of the heavens." (Exodus 24:10) From this linguistic perspective, it becomes necessary to understand the commandment to count-sefira-as a commandment to become pure and to move closer to the throne of the Almighty. Since there is no redemption without repentance and purification, we now understand why Shavuot is also the time when we receive the Torah from G-d-our road map to purity and redemption-and why Shavuot is truly the festival of our destiny. We now also understand why Mystical and Hassidic literature refers to the emanations of the Divine in this world as sefirot. © 2005 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI ARON TENDLER

Rabbi's Notebook

After the Jews crossed over the Yarden, the land was divided between the tribes and further subdivided between the families. Those parcels of land were called ancestral properties. It was intended that these properties remain in the possession of their original families; however, a family could sell their properties due to dire economic circumstances. The second to last Parsha in Vayikra presents the laws of Yovel (Jubile) and the return of ancestral properties to their original owners.

The sale of ancestral properties was not a complete transference of ownership from the family of origin to the buyer. Almost all ancestral properties reverted back to their families of origin at the Yovel (50th year) year; therefore, a more accurate description of what the Torah means by the sale of such property would be a long-term lease. Additionally, the sale was only guaranteed for two years. Following the first two years of the sale the original family(the sellers) could at any time buy back the property for its original selling price.

The laws of Yovel were intended to recalibrate the overall economy of Israel. Those who had made money from their land purchases and developments during the previous 50 years would of course keep their profits but at the Yovel year the original properties and their developments would revert back to the ownership of the original family. On the one hand it might seem unfair, on the other hand, every investor and developer went into a land purchase knowing that their purchase/lease was capped at fifty years.

The law of the return of properties at the Yovel made it absolutely clear that all things, including ownership of land and the successes of investments, were determined by G-d and G-d alone. As the Parsha states, (25:23) "...The land belongs to Me. You are merely dwellers and sojourners with Me."

Allow me to explain.

At the time of the Exodus all the Jews were wealthy. No one was destitute and no one had financial needs. Fulfilling G-d's request, they had taken with them

the wealth of Egypt. Added to that was the wealth of the drowned Egyptian army that had been collected on the shores of the Yam Suf.

During their time in the desert G-d took care of all their needs "like a mother nurses her child." When they entered the land of Israel they were each given a portion of land from which they were able to support their families and their future descendents. In essence, G-d designed it that the Jews would never have to be dependent on any one else or any other nation for their economic well-being.

The underlying message was, "You are my servants, not the servants of servants." You are to be subject only to Me. You are not to be enslaved to the daily grind of eking out an existence from unforgiving ground and relentless pressures. However, this exclusive relationship with G-d presumed a level of Emunah (faith) and Bitachon (trust) that reflected the lessons of the Exodus and the desert experience. It presumed a belief in the totality of G-d's benevolence as the source of all wealth no different than He had been at the time the Jews exited Egypt and entered the Promised Land. It presumed a trust of G-d that He would continue to be the source of all wealth and economic independence, always and forever.

The truly foolish reality of Jewish history is that regardless of where we lived, whether in Israel or in the Diaspora, the message remained the same. Our dependency on G-d remained absolute and complete. Regardless of the good times or the bad times, whether it was the golden era of Spanish Jewry and the extraordinary success of the modern day American community, or the centuries of persecution and destitution that has been until recently the normative Jewish experience, our dependency on G-d was and remains absolute and complete. The only variable is the degree of our forced enslavement to the demands of society and economy. The greater our Emunah (faith) and Bitachon (trust) the less our enslavement. The less our belief and trust in the totality of our dependency on G-d the more our enslavement to the demands of society and economy.

Continuing with the theme of Vayikra, Kedusha (sanctity) and the designation of purpose and value as defined by our service to G-d, the Torah details the laws of ancestral portions and the return of those properties at Yovel to their families of origin. It makes sense to conclude that the portion every family received was unique to them and their service to G-d. As such, the recalibration of the economy with the return of the ancestral properties to their families of origin served to reconnect each family unit to the concept of mandated purpose, value, and the totality of their dependence on G-d.

In Parshas B'Haloscha, the commentaries argue as to whether or not Yisro returned to Midian or continued on with the nation in occupying the land of Israel. In past issues I explained that Yisro's dilemma

was predicated on the fact that as a convert he would not receive an ancestral portion of the land. Eventually, his children would marry into the nation and inherit a portion, but not himself. Therefore, Yisro may have concluded that the land of Israel was not essential to his personal mission as an servant of G-d; otherwise he too would have received a portion. Because he was not going to receive a portion he felt that he could return to Midian to accomplish his personal mission-spreading the word of G-d to the other nations.

The Jews of the Exodus were different. From the very beginning at the Bris Bain Habsarim (covenant between the halves) G-d promised Avraham that his children would inherit the land and leave their time of enslavement with great wealth. Clearly, G-d intended that the Jews should live in Israel without the ongoing economic worries that plague us today. On a more profound level, it was clear that G-d intended that each tribe should live in a specific location and that each family should have their exclusive place, their Makom Kavuah, their ancestral portion within their tribe's borders.

For the Jews to achieve their mission they must live in Israel. For any one family to achieve their personal mission they must be connected to their ancestral properties. In fact, the concept of divinely allocated ancestral properties goes even further. It suggests that every person must approach his or her personal service to G-d from a multileveled perspective. On the one hand he must view his own unique talents, strengths, and challenges (weaknesses) in ascertaining his unique purpose and mission. He must also consider the family into which he was born to further understand and expand his identity and mission. He must then consider the tribe to which he belongs as well as the general designation and value of his position as a member of the Jewish people.

The message becomes clearer and clearer. "Love your neighbor as you love yourself" translates into value your neighbor as you value yourself. Start with valuing yourself. Do the work of ascertaining your own unique creation and purpose as defined by the person you are, the family and tribe into which you were born, and the chosenness of being a Jew. Know that G-d intended whatever is the sum total of that equation. Likewise, every other "neighbor" (Jew) that you will meet will be equally chosen and valuable. Be certain to value him or her as they deserve to be valued and treat them accordingly. From that familiar point of reference we must then extrapolate the value of every human being. More so, recognize and accept that G-d grants Jew and non-Jew the means for attaining their purpose (their unique mission) no different than G-d provides you with the means of attaining your purpose. (Birchas Kohanim-the blessings of the Kohanim-see Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch)

Therefore; make sure that your interaction with everyone advances their personal cause rather than

hinders it. Recognize and accept that the confluence of destinies that brought you in contact with each other, for however long or short a time, was intended by the Creator for each of yours advancement. Sometimes the encounter will force you to overcome negative traits within yourself and better yourself in the process. Other times it will reinforce positive traits of kindness, generosity, and humility and strengthen your better self in preparation for greater opportunities and challenges. At the same time, the other person is also being granted the opportunity of growing through overcoming the negative and strengthening the positive. Nothing is by chance, everything is by design, and the opportunities of serving G-d and each other are constant and ever present.

What does G-d want from us? Clearly, He wishes us to come to terms with the tools He has given us and do our best in accomplishing our mission. That is why G-d provided so many hints and sign posts along the road of our lives to help us succeed and not fail.

Also, G-d does not give up on us. Rav Dessler has a magnificent essay on not giving up on ourselves where he states that the further we are from recognizing G-d the greater His Chesed (kindness). Not to suggest that the sinner benefits from his sinning; just the opposite. The sinner must and will suffer the consequences of his actions; however, G-d will never give up on that sinner. G-d will continue to provide opportunity after opportunity for the advancement of that person toward the successful fulfillment of his or her mission.

What happened when a person or family failed to accomplish their mission due to financial hardships of their own doing or otherwise? Clearly, everything happens within the design of the Creator and the individual and family must have needed to undergo the financial difficulties in order to accomplish their mission. Because G-d is invested in success rather than failure we can assume that at some point the intended lesson of being destitute was learned by the family and individual or else G-d would have employed some other approach. Therefore, at some point G-d granted the family the opportunity of regaining its original wealth. That opportunity came every 50 years with the laws of Yovel.

Imagine a family that had to sell its ancestral portion due to economic hardships. Although the sale provides a degree of relief the family never regains the opportunity of redeeming their original land. Fifty years pass during which the ensuing one, two, or three generations learn the tools and skills intended by G-d to advance their mission. During that time the ancestral lands were successfully developed into income producing properties that earned for their interim owners wealth and financial independence. With the advent of Yovel the original owners of the land, the family of origin, stand to experience an economic windfall when their ancestral properties are returned to

them fully developed and financially viable. At that time they can either arrange some kind of a managerial deal with the interim owners so that they both reap the benefits of the 50 years of investment or they can undertake the management of the properties themselves. Either way, the family discovers that the 50 years of relative difficulty have ended and G-d has once again granted them the gift of potential economic independence. In essence, G-d has repeated history and given the family a second chance for living in Israel under similar conditions as their ancestors lived when they first crossed over the Yarden river! Once again the family is in the position to accomplish its intended mission without economic worries and difficulties.

This concept of correction and second chance is evident from Rashi 25:18. The verse says, "Do My decrees and My ordinances (the laws of Shemitah)... and you will live securely in the land." Rashi comments, "Because of the sin of not keeping the Shemitah (seven year cycle) the Jews were exiled from the land... The 70 years of exile in Babylon were in exchange of the 70 Shemitahs that the Jews did not keep." The laws of Shemitah and exile teach us that our wealth and economic independence is a gift from G-d. Without His ongoing benevolence and largess we would not have the economic safety and independence we enjoy. So long as we recognize upon Whom we depend and keep His Mitzvos we are gifted with that independence as well as the tool called Israle. If we do not remember our absolute dependency on G-d and do not use Israle to accomplish our individual, familial, and national objectives G-d takes back His gift of economic and national independence.

The objective of the Jewish nation is to spread the reality of the Creator to the rest of the nations. The easiest way to do so is by all of us living in Israel and living in the way G-d intended with economic independence and security. However, when we ignored the 70 years of Shemitah and lost sight of: who we were as a nation, what our mission was as a nation, and upon Whom we were dependent for the gift of economic independence and Israel, G-d sent us into exile. His reason for doing so was to continue our national mission of teaching His reality to the other nations. However, we would have to do so without the ease and benefit of economic and national independence. Instead, we would still have to accomplish our mission while subject to the persecution and economic pressures of another nation. Once the 70 years of Shemitah had been made up and we had learned the lesson of our absolute and total dependency on G-d (the story of Purim) G-d gave us back Israel, the Temple, and a second chance. Finally, as we near the end of Vayikra, the book devoted to presenting the ideal life style of the Jew (a lifestyle of sanctity, designation, purpose, and value), the Torah once again emphasizes the setting of family to accomplish this ideal. It is the family that sells its ancestral lands and it

is the family that will eventually regain its wealth and independence with the return of the properties at Yovel.

The verse states (25:23) "And the land should not be sold in Tzmitzus (perpetuity) because the land belongs to Me (and not you)." The original division of the land between the 12 tribes and further subdivision between the families was intended by G-d for reasons far beyond economic and financial fairness. Each parcel and section is intimately linked to the identity and mission of the person, family, and nation. G-d tells us in no uncertain terms, "Keep those divisions! Follow My prescription for success and independence! Protect and maintain the sanctity of the land, the sanctity of the family, and the sanctity of the individual. If you do so, (25:24) "...redemption will come to the land!" © 2005 Rabbi A. Tandler & torah.org

RABBI NOSSON CHAYIM LEFF

Sfas Emes

The Sfas Emes starts by alluding to the first paragraph of Medrash Rabba of Parshas Behar. The Medrash, in turn, quotes a pasuk in Mishlei (18:21): "Maves vechayim beyad halashon." (ArtScroll: "Death and life are in the power of the tongue.")

Why does the Medrash discuss the power of speech here, in Parshas Behar? The formal reason is straightforward. Later in the parsha (25, 17), the Torah tells us to avoid "ona'as devarim," i.e., from giving people grief- hurting people-with what we say. Hence, the focus on being careful with one's speech. Still, the question persists. The Torah tells us about "ona'as devarim" well into the parsha. Why does the Medrash give this topic star billing by discussing it in its very first paragraph?

I suggest that Chazal chose to focus on the potential good or potential harm that we can do with what we say because, in fact, "maves vechaim beyad halashon." That is, our words can do much good or much harm. A (partial) list of harmful speech includes: foul language; citing the name of gentile gods; saying things that cause pain to the listener; saying things that are not true; and, of course, old reliable-lashon hara.

By the same token, what we do say can bring much good. Here is an example of a mode of speech which, when utilized, can increase the 'chayim'-life and joy-of which the pasuk in Mishlei speaks. Unfortunately, many people suffer from low self-esteem. In that context, it is important to let people know when they are doing a good job. Why? Because a remark of commendation from an outside observer can help replace self-doubt with self-confidence. And a deserved pat on the back can correct the distorted self-image from which a person with low self-esteem typically suffers.

To drive home the point that our speech can be either highly destructive or highly constructive, the Medrash provides some metaphors. One metaphor

speaks of a burning coal. If a person uses his mouth to breathe on the ember, he can revive its fire. By contrast, if the person uses his mouth to spit on the coal, he will extinguish its fire.

Mention of the burning coal draws the Sfas Emes into the discussion.

Certainly, he explains, HaShem's chiyus is present throughout Creation. For when He created the world, Hashem used the Torah, which we know is compared to fire. Hence, just as the burning coal radiates fire, so too does HaShem's Presence permeate all Creation. But HaShem created the world in such a manner that the Torah, with its light and its warmth, is hidden, as in the burning coal.

Further, the metaphor of the burning coal-whose internal fire is not apparent-brings with it a major responsibility for us. For, continues the Sfas Emes, we are charged with the mission of searching for (and finding!) the illumination of the Torah that is present everywhere.

These are truly beautiful thoughts ; but what do they mean? What does the Sfas Emes have in mind when he says that we can-and indeed, must-find the Torah's illumination in every thing in the world? I emphasize that what follows here in an effort to answer this question is only le'anias da'ati-i. e. comes only from my very limited knowledge. But the issues here are so important that it is worth trying to address the question.

We need some help. I suggest that we can get the necessary help from R. Nachman of Breslov (z'ta.). On the very first page of his sefer Likutei Maharar, R' Nachman writes: "Ki ha'ish ha'yisra'eili tzarich tamid lehishkeil ba'seichel shel kohel davar. U'lekasheir ahtzmo el ha'chochma ve'haseichel she'yeish be'chol davar. Kedei she'yair lo ha'seichel she'yeish be'chol davar lehiskareiv laShem yisborach ahl yedei oso davar." That is: "For a Jew must always look for the seichel (intelligence / rationality / logic) that is present in all things. And he should attach himself to the knowledge and the rationality present in every thing will provide him with light, and thus enable him to come closer to HaShem via that thing."

R. Nachman is telling us that HaShem built rationality into the world. (When I say 'rationality', I refer to such features as cause/effect-in counter-distinction to randomness or chaos.) Hence, by observing the world around us and learning how it works, we can be aware of HaShem's Presence. And the rationality that we perceive can bring us closer to HaShem.

These ideas of R' Nachman can help clarify a key thought of the Sfas Emes that may previously have been obscure. I refer to the Sfas Emes's recurring dictum that what we do in our work during the weekdays-our asiya; our ma'aseh- can be a form of avoda (serving HaShem, worship). Some possibilities for avoda (worship) in the course of avoda (weekday work) come readily to mind. An obvious example is the physicist or the biologist who marvel at the uncanny way

with which HaShem put this world together. But R. Nachman's insight shows us that the potential for avoda (service of HaShem) in the course of one's weekday avoda (work) also exists in more humble occupations.

For example, consider the case of a salesperson who sells shoes. Rationality here would require that he find the shoe that truly fits a customer's feet. The salesperson searches-using trial-and-error as well as measurement-until he finds the right shoe. By finding the accurate solution to his problem, the salesperson brings to light the presence of rationality-and hence, HaShem-in his world. (You may find this example farfetched. If so, it probably means that you have never encountered the irrationality of buying and wearing a pair of shoes that did not fit.)

Likewise, consider a bond trader who detects a possibility for profitable arbitrage. That opportunity reflects irrationality-i.e., momentary disequilibrium in the market. Hence, by executing trades that correct the disequilibrium, the bond trader is bringing about rationality, and thus revealing HaShem's presence in his weekday activity.

More generally, the same possibility for avoda is open in any context where a person solves problems. By "figuring things out," a person can find the rationality that HaShem built into the situation. But like the fire in the ember, the rationality cannot be perceived unless we make an effort. By trying to understand the logic of a phenomenon or of a situation, a person can bring himself closer to HaShem.

In an earlier version of this shiur, when I mentioned the bond trader who was taking advantage of an arbitrage opportunity, a professional bond trader raised a basic objection. This bond trader had much experience in buying and selling financial assets. He had never felt that by executing trades for profitable arbitrage, he was revealing rationality, and hence, HaShem's presence.

This bond trader's objection brought to mind a story about Shelomo Hamelech (King Solomon). One day while traveling on the road, Shelomo Hamelech encountered two men who were transporting a heavy stone. The king stopped and asked them what they were doing. The first person replied, "I am carrying a heavy stone." The second man answered, "I am building the Beis Hamikdash!" The moral of the story as it applies to our bond trader? It helps to see oneself in accurate metaphysical context. © 2005 Rabbi N.C. Leff & Torah.org

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak

There is a very clear and well known similarity between counting the Omer, about which we were told in the previous Torah portion (Vayikra 23:15-16), and the count of the years leading to the Yovel,

which appears in this week's portion (25:8-9). In both cases, the command is to count "seven 'shabbatot'-weeks in the case of the Omer, and annual cycles of the Shemitta with respect to the Yovel. In both cases, the final number of fifty has a special sanctity. With respect to the Omer, "until the day after the seventh week you shall count, fifty days" [Vayikra 23:16], and with respect to the Yovel, "you shall sanctify the fiftieth year" [25:10].

However, a closer look at the two passages reveals a fundamental difference between the two counts. The emphasis with respect to the Omer is to count fifty days, calculated as seven weeks, with Shavuot immediately following the next day: "And you shall count for you, the day after the holiday, from the day you bring the uplifted Omer, let there be seven full weeks. Until the day after the seventh week shall you count, fifty days." [23:15-16]. With the Yovel, on the other hand, the emphasis is to count forty-nine years, and this is then followed by sanctifying the fiftieth year: "And you shall count seven annual cycles, seven times seven years, and the seven groups of years will be forty-nine years. And you shall blow the sound of a shofar in the seventh month, on the tenth of the month. On Yom Kippur shall you blow a shofar throughout the land. And you shall sanctify the fiftieth year." [25:8-10].

This summary shows the essential difference between the two obligations of counting. The counting of the Omer is a long and continuous process, which begins "the day after the holiday," on the day that the sacrifice of the Omer is brought. This is "the first of your harvest" [23:10]. The process ends with the offer of the Bikurim, the first fruits, at the end of the first stage of the harvest on the land. In this count, the weeks that have passed by have no special significance, since there is nothing noteworthy about the end of each week. The count of weeks is mentioned only as an arithmetic device to clarify the counting of fifty days, until the process is complete. The Torah does not explain why the process ends after fifty days. Evidently, in addition to the correspondence with the agricultural process, the number fifty represents a complete whole. This is similar to other cases in the Torah, such as the number of righteous men with which Avraham began his prayers about Sedom (Bereishit 18:24), the number of loops and hooks in the curtains in the Tabernacle (Shemot 26:5-6), and the maximum monetary value of a man for purposes of donations to the Temple (Vayikra 27:3).

In contrast, with respect to Yovel there is an explicit mitzva to first count forty-nine years, signifying the end of seven cycles of the Shemitta. This combined count is relevant for the end of the cycle of the Yovel. This is not one long process but a series of subsidiary steps, which in the end lead to the coming of the Yovel. The Torah portion of Behar emphasizes the number seven many times, implying that the number fifty is not important in itself but is simply the number that follows the important sequence of seven periods of Shemitta.