

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

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, Metzorah, Emor and Behar - seem to be almost fixated on the commandment to count, the commandment of sefirah. Barely two chapters ago we were commanded, "And you shall count for yourselves - from the day following the rest day (the first day of the festival of Passover), from the day when you bring the Omer of the waving - seven weeks... until the day after the seventh week you shall count fifty days..." (Leviticus 33:15,16); the Bible has commanded us to count each day of the seven weeks between the Festivals of Passover and Shavuot, until the fiftieth day. And now in this week's portion of Behar the Bible commands us to count the seven cycles of the sabbatical years (seven times seven or forty nine years) until the fiftieth: 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 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). But 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 are 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 Jubilee year is Biblically defined as a declaration of universal freedom and the return of every individual to his homestead, obvious expressions of redemption.

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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 root '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. © 2011 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The opening commandment in this week's parsha deals with shemitta - the sabbatical year for the Land of Israel when the ground was to be allowed to lie fallow and the farmer abstained from his regular routine of work. The traditional commentators to the Torah emphasized that even though the ground and farmer would benefit in the long run from the year's inactivity this was not the reason for the commandment.

There are always side benefits from obeying the commandments of the Torah but these are never the reason or the basis for the commandment itself. The underlying lesson of the sabbatical year is its obvious kinship to the weekly Sabbath. Just as every seven days brings with it a holy day of rest, so too does a holy sabbatical year bring with it a rest for the earth itself.

And, to continue this obvious comparison between these two Sabbaths, just as the weekly Sabbath is meant to remind us of G-d's creation of the universe so too does the seven year Sabbath testify to

G-d's omnipotence and presence in all of our human affairs.

The foundation and basis of all of Jewish faith and belief in its Torah is the necessity of human acknowledgement of G-d's role in our lives and in His ability to instruct us how to live. Since the weekly Sabbath sometimes is taken for granted for it becomes such an accustomed and regular part of our existence, the seven year Sabbath comes to jolt us out of our complacency and to have us recognize clearly, once again G-d's rule over us.

Shemitta has always been a difficult test of faith for the Jewish people. Even in Temple times it appears that the commandment was never fully fulfilled. There are many reasons for this apparent laxity in observance, the most obvious one being the seeming impracticality of its observance.

The Torah promised prosperity because of shemitta observance but the people feared the practicality of observing this commandment properly. In our time the shemitta remains a contentious topic with various halachic solutions being advanced and implanted, all in effect circumventing the true basic observance of the commandment itself.

Apparently the commandment was meant for a more perfectly faithful society than the one we have ever been successful in achieving. Nevertheless, the challenge posed by the shemitta remains omnipresent in Jewish life. As long as there is not a proper balance between human effort and ultimate faith in the Almighty we remain a somewhat dysfunctional society.

The shemitta reminds us of our dependence upon G-d and on factors that are not within our human power to control. It forces us to renew our weekly sabbatical testimony as to the creation and guidance of our world and its events. Even if we are unable to fulfill the shemitta commandment fully as of yet, the idea behind it demands our discipline and understanding. The weekly Sabbath is the basic day of Jewish observance. The seven year Sabbath reinforces this basis of all Torah observance. © 2011 Rabbi Berel Wein - Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com

CHIEF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

One of the most striking features of the torah is its emphasis on love of, and vigilance toward, the ger, the stranger: Do not oppress a stranger; you yourselves know how it feels to be strangers, because you were strangers in Egypt. (Ex. 23: 9)

For the Lord your G-d is G-d of gods and Lord of lords, the great G-d, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves

the stranger residing among you, giving them food and clothing. You are to love those who are strangers, for you yourselves were strangers in Egypt. (Deut 10: 17-19)

The sages went so far as to say that the Torah commands us in only one place to love our neighbour but in thirty six times to love the stranger (Baba Metsia 59b).

What is the definition of a stranger? Clearly the reference is to one who is not Jewish by birth. It could mean one of the original inhabitants of the land of Canaan. It could mean one of the "mixed multitude" who left Egypt with the Israelites. It might mean a foreigner who has entered the land seeking safety or a livelihood.

Whatever the case, immense significance is attached to the way the Israelites treat the stranger. This was what they were meant to have learned from their own experience of exile and suffering in Egypt. They were strangers. They were oppressed. Therefore they knew "how it feels to be a stranger." They were not to inflict on others what was once inflicted on them.

The sages held that the word *ger* might mean one of two things. One was a *ger tzedek*, a convert to Judaism who had accepted all its commands and obligations. The other was the *ger toshav*, the "resident alien", who had not adopted the religion of Israel but who lived in the land of Israel. Behar spells out the rights of such a person. Specifically: If any of your fellow Israelites become poor and are unable to support themselves among you, help them as you would a resident alien, so they can continue to live among you. (25: 35)

There is, in other words, an obligation to support and sustain a resident alien. Not only does he or she have the right to live in the holy land, but they have the right to share in its welfare provisions. Recall that this is a very ancient law indeed, long before the sages formulated such principles as "the ways of peace", obligating Jews to extend charity and care to non-Jews as well as Jews.

What then was a *ger toshav*? There are three views in the Talmud. According to Rabbi Meir it was anyone who took on himself not to worship idols. According to the sages, it was anyone who committed himself to keep the seven Noahide commands. A third view, more stringent, held that it was someone who had undertaken to keep all the commands of the Torah except one, the prohibition of meat not ritually slaughtered (Avodah Zarah 64b). The law follows the sages. A *ger toshav* is thus a non-Jew living in Israel who accepts the Noahide laws binding on everyone.

Ger toshav legislation is thus one of the earliest extant forms of minority rights. According to the Rambam there is an obligation on Jews in Israel to establish courts of law for resident aliens to allow them to settle their own disputes - or disputes they have with Jews - according to the provisions of Noahide law. The

Rambam adds: "One should act toward resident aliens with the same respect and loving kindness as one would to a fellow Jew" (Hilkhot Melachim 10: 12).

The difference between this and later "ways of peace" legislation is that the ways of peace apply to non-Jews without regard to their beliefs or religious practice. They date from a time when Jews were a minority in a predominantly non-Jewish, non-monotheistic environment. "Ways of peace" are essentially pragmatic rules of what today we would call good community relations and active citizenship in a multi-ethnic and multicultural society. *Ger toshav* legislation cuts deeper. It is based not on pragmatism but religious principle. According to the Torah you don't have to be Jewish in a Jewish society and land to have many of the rights of citizenship. You simply have to be moral.

One biblical vignette portrays this with enormous power. King David has fallen in love and had an adulterous relationship with Batsheva, wife of a *ger toshav*, Uriah the Hittite. She becomes pregnant. Uriah meanwhile has been away from home as a soldier in Israel's army. David, afraid that Uriah will come home, see that his wife is pregnant, realise that she has committed adultery, and come to discover that the king is the guilty party, has Uriah brought home. His pretext is that he wants to know how the battle is going. He then tells Uriah to go home and sleep with his wife before returning, so that he will later assume that he himself is the father of the child. The plan fails. This is what happens:

So David sent this word to Joab: "Send me Uriah the Hittite." And Joab sent him to David. When Uriah came to him, David asked him how Joab was, how the soldiers were and how the war was going. Then David said to Uriah, "Go down to your house and wash your feet." So Uriah left the palace, and a gift from the king was sent after him. But Uriah slept at the entrance to the palace with all his master's servants and did not go down to his house.

David was told, "Uriah did not go home." So he asked Uriah, "Haven't you just come from a military campaign? Why didn't you go home?"

Uriah said to David, "The ark and Israel and Judah are staying in tents, and my commander Joab and my lord's men are camped in the open country. How could I go to my house to eat and drink and make love to my wife? As surely as you live, I will not do such a thing!" (2 Samuel 11: 6-11)

Uriah's utter loyalty to the Jewish people, despite the fact that he is not himself Jewish, is contrasted with King David, who has stayed in Jerusalem, not been with the army, and instead had a relationship with another man's wife. The fact that Tanakh can tell such a story in which a resident alien is the moral hero, and David, Israel's greatest king, the wrongdoer, tells us much about the morality of Judaism.

Minority rights are the best test of a free and just society. Since the days of Moses they have been central to the vision of the kind of society G-d wants us to create in the land of Israel. How vital, therefore, that we take them seriously today. © 2011 Chief Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and torah.org

RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftorah

This week's haftorah reinforces the notion of our eternal relationship with our homeland, Eretz Yisroel. In the midst of a heavy Babylonian siege against Yerushalayim, the prophet Yirmiyahu was instructed to make a most puzzling transaction. Hashem informed Yirmiyahu that his cousin Chanamel was interested in selling his field and that Yirmiyahu should take full advantage of the opportunity. Although Yirmiyahu realized that the Jewish exile was imminent and that the Babylonians would soon take full possession of Eretz Yisroel he followed Hashem's direction and arranged for the purchase. Yirmiyahu wrote a legal contract and paid a large sum of money for the land. Yirmiyahu then preserved the document in an earthen vessel to secure its existence until such evidence would be useful.

The prophet then directed his words to Hashem in bewilderment and questioned, "Since the Babylonian war machines are in full gear and the Jewish exile is already on its way, of what purpose is this sale?" Hashem responded, "I am the Master of all; is there anything beyond My capabilities? The Jewish people will return and re-engage themselves in such purchases and the land will be resettled." The dialogue seems to be somewhat understood; however the purchase remains a mystery. Hashem had sent many prophets to the Jews regarding their eventual return from the Babylonian exile. Why was it necessary to demonstrate their return through this tangible experience? It is certainly fair to assume that Yirmiyahu would not derive any personal benefit from this purchase. After all, he was on the way to a long and hard exile of seventy years without any indication of personally returning to Eretz Yisroel. Why then was he instructed to waste his money in securing what, for him, was a seemingly useless transaction?

In response it can be suggested that this purchase taught the Jewish people a very meaningful lesson. One can easily imagine the feelings of the Jewish people during that era. They were finally confronted with the reality that they would soon be forced to leave their homeland. Although they had enjoyed the privilege of dwelling in the palace of the king for nearly one thousand years this privilege was now drawing to a close. Their minds were now focused on their unfortunate plight and they dreaded severing their ties with Eretz Yisroel. Although this painful thought surely tormented them but the reality was that

their association with Eretz Yisroel was slowly beginning its decline.

At that exact moment the prophet Yirmiyahu was instructed to secure the purchase of a plot of land. Through this visible demonstration, the Jews were being told to rise above their inevitable predicament and to realize that their painful exile would only be temporary. They were encouraged not to despair and never to break their ties with their homeland, Eretz Yisroel. To reinforce this point their prophet Yirmiyahu was instructed to demonstrate his total faith in the Jewish people's return. Yirmiyahu began setting his sights on the future and purchased property in preparation for the return. In Yirmiyahu's mind this upcoming exile was but a passing phase and he rightfully preoccupied himself in life after the brief Babylonian stay. Yirmiyahu taught the Jews that the Jewish people never really leave Eretz Yisroel and that they are always bound to their homeland. He taught them that they truly belong to Eretz Yisroel and that Eretz Yisroel would always belong to them.

A similar lesson regarding our relationship with Hashem is revealed to us at the end of this week's parsha. The Torah warns the Jews to adhere to all of Hashem's mitzvos even after their exile from Eretz Yisroel. The Sforno explains the reason for this general warning which encompasses mitzvos that don't specifically relate to Eretz Yisroel. He states that the Jews in exile could easily present the argument of rejection. After all, Hashem expelled the Jews from His land, indicative of His lack of interest in the Jewish nation. If so, what binds the Jewish people to the mitzvos, considering that Hashem severed His relationship with His people!? The Torah therefore reminds us that its obligations remain forever and that Hashem is forever concerned about His people. The Sforno notes that even after the Bais Hamikdash was destroyed the Divine Presence remains amongst the Jewish people. This phenomena is felt in our Bais Haknesses, synagogue and Bais Hamidrash, Torah study hall which continue to embody the Divine Presence at all times. (see Sforno's comment to Vayikra 26:12) We learn from this that Hashem never forsakes His people and remains amongst them always because Hashem will always be our G-d and we will always be His chosen nation. © 2011 Rabbi D. Siegel & torah.org

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

In this week's prophetic portion, Jeremiah prophesied about the destruction of the First Temple. G-d 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 G-d told Jeremiah the Temple was doomed, Jeremiah clung on

to the city. While he knew the word of G-d 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 G-d'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 off 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. © 2011 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale.

RABBI YISROEL CINER

Parsha Insights

This weeks parsha, B'har, begins with the mitzva of shmita. "Shesh shanim tizrah sadecha... uvashanah hashevi'is, shabbos shabason yihyeh la'aretz, shabbos laHashem"-six years you will plant your field... and on the seventh year, a sabbatical will be for the land, a sabbatical for Hashem" (25:3-4).

The Kli Yakar brings numerous opinions explaining the reason of this mitzva. Many explain that it allows the earth to rebuild itself in terms of its ability to provide the necessary nutrition for proper growth. However, he asks, if this mitzva is simply an ecological consideration, why would the punishment for lack of observance be exile?! The natural punishment should be the natural consequence of his actions-a depleted field producing a poor harvest. Furthermore, how could this year of 'save the planet' be termed a "shabbos laHashem"-a sabbatical for Hashem-it's a sabbatical for the earth!

Others, the Kli Yakar states, explain this mitzva as a reminder of creation. The 'six time unit work, seventh time unit rest' cycle shows our belief in Hashem having created the world with such a cycle. However, he asks, if the weekly shabbos doesn't suffice for us to internalize that concept, it's hard to see how a mitzva observed once every seven years will do the trick!

The Kli Yakar therefore explains that the mitzva of shmita is to instill in Klal Yisroel a deep, firm emunah and bitachon-belief and trust- in Hashem. As we enter Eretz Yisroel we face a danger far graver than any physical threat. With the cessation of the manna we must begin to plow, plant and harvest in the way of the rest of the world. Perhaps we will start to think that it is the strength of our own hands that is supplying us with our needs. We are the owners of our land! We are the sole controllers of our own destiny! A dangerous thought process that strikes at the very core and purpose of Klal Yisroel!

The normal procedure was to plant two years and let the land lay fallow for one. We are told to plant for six years straight, and guaranteed that the land won't lose its strength! To add to this miracle, the sixth year, the year when the land should be, by then, exhausted, will be the most productive year, yielding sufficient produce for three years!

A miraculous cycle for a miraculous nation situated on a miraculous land. Know to where our faith must be directed! Know Who is supplying our needs! Know Who owns and controls our land! Know Who controls our destiny!

If we keep the laws of shmita, we are told: "The land will give its fruit and you will eat and be satisfied (25:19)". Rashi explains and the Sforno elaborates that the fruits will be of super nutritional value in that a small amount will satiate. In other words, the produce of the sixth year will be quantitatively equal to that of other years, but will miraculously supply you for the additional time.

"And if you will ask: what will we eat on the seventh year? I will send a blessing on the sixth year and it will yield produce for three years (25:20-21)." The Sforno explains that this means a visible blessing that will quantitatively suffice for three years.

The Lev Eliyahu explains as follows. If you will have the proper faith in Hashem and will not ask what

will you eat the seventh year then the amount grown will be the usual amount. No additional harvesting or storage for you to contend with. You'll eat a small amount and be fully satisfied and nutritionalized.

If, however, you'll have doubts about what you'll be eating the seventh year. If your level of faith will be low, then Hashem will be 'forced' to send enough in the sixth year to assuage your worries. You'll have the trouble of harvesting three years worth of produce in the span of one year and the bother of transporting and storing such a large amount.

This is the way that Hashem deals with us, not only during shmita, but every day of our life. We act and He reacts. Our level of emunah and bitachon determines what sort of bracha, what sort of miracle, He will send to us. As we've discussed earlier, we're surrounded with miracles. Nature is nothing but a miracle that we've grown accustomed to. As we say in our shmone esrei prayer, "v'al nisecha sheb'chol yom imanu", and for your miracles that are with us every day.

However, our level of trust will determine the level of the miracle that is sent our way. Can the bracha can come in an easy way for us or must it come in a bothersome way. Can we invest less time toward our physical and materialistic needs, thereby allowing us to invest in our avodas Hashem, our spiritual pursuits, and yet come out with enough? Or must we spend every ounce of our strength on our livelihood in order to come out with that, very same, enough!

These are the lessons in emuna and bitachon that are instilled in us by the mitzva of shmita.

When discussing the ultimate redemption, the geulah, the pasuk most quoted is, "b'eto"-in its time, "achishena"-I will hurry it. The gemara (Sanhedrin) explains that if the generation will merit, the redemption will be hurried and come early. If we will not merit, then it will come in its preordained time.

The Chafetz Chaim asks how can we hope for an 'early' geulah? If the earlier generations, with their tremendous merits, weren't able to bring the geulah, how can we have the audacity to believe that we can!!!

He explains that the answer can be found in our parsha. "(If a Jew) sells himself to a non-Jew living amongst you" (25:47). The parsha explains that he can be redeemed until yovel, the fiftieth year. The calculation of the redemption price is to divide the years that he was sold by the sale price. If he was sold for 40 years at \$40,000, then the redemption rate is \$1,000 for every year. If he'll be redeemed one year after the sale, the cost will be \$39,000. After twenty years it will cost \$20,000. After 39 years of work it will cost a mere \$1,000 to redeem him. If he won't be redeemed at all, then at yovel he will go out free.

The Chafetz Chaim explains that the same principle can be applied to our 'sale to the nations', our exile. There was a predetermined end time set for the exile. That is what we referred to as 'b'eto'-in its time. The further we are from that time, the greater amount of

merit necessary to bring the geulah. The closer we are to that point, a lesser amount of merit is needed.

It is true that the earlier generations were on a much higher level than we and yet were unable to bring the geulah, but they needed to 'pay' that much more than we! We, who are so much closer to the end point, need that much less than they did! We can't give up hope in our ability to 'hurry' the redemption!

We also must keep in mind that even if we won't come up with the necessary merit, "And he will go out at the yovel year" (25:54). When the 'b'eto' arrives, the redemption will come regardless of the merits that we have to offer.

If that is what the Chofetz Chaim wrote so many years ago for his generation, then certainly we of the 90's must keep our faith in the Moshiach coming. With all of the sacrifices that have been offered, with all of the Torah that is now being learned, with the few remaining years left until the Moshiach must come, we must believe in and work toward that 'achishena'-that hurrying of the redemption.

May we merit that the trust and faith that we learn from shmita will elevate us and our generation, 'pushing' the hand of Hashem to send us Moshiach tzidkenu, speedily in our days. © 2011 Rabbi Y. Ciner & Project Genesis, Inc.

RABBI NAFTALI REICH

Legacy

How low can a Jew fall in status? Even when a Jew is overcome by such difficult circumstances that he is sold into slavery, he still retains some of his former dignity and identity. At least, he finds himself in the home of a coreligionist with a similar life style. However, enslavement to a gentile resident of Eretz Yisrael, to bear the yoke of an alien master, that is the ultimate social degradation possible for a Jew. How can this unfortunate slave maintain his ties to family and tradition under such conditions? The Torah, at the end of this week's portion, directs him to hold fast two commandments- spurning idolatry and keeping the Sabbath.

Why does the Torah single out these two particular commandments? We can easily understand why the Torah emphasizes the prohibition against idolatry, since this is the very antithesis of Judaism. But why the emphasis on the Sabbath more than on other observances such as wearing tefillin or studying the Torah?

We find a similar emphasis on the Sabbath in the Midrash. When Moses was a young boy growing up in Pharaoh's palace, he was extremely disturbed by the physical affliction and spiritual decline of his Jewish brethren. It occurred to him that if the Jewish people would be allowed to observe the Sabbath, they would survive the Egyptian bondage as an exalted people. The Midrash relates that Moses suggested to Pharaoh

that he could significantly increase the productivity of his Jewish slaves by allowing them a day of rest to replenish their depleted stores of energy. Pharaoh followed this advice, and the productivity did indeed increase. But at the same time, the Jewish people were able to congregate and celebrate the Sabbath, thus ensuring their spiritual survival. Once again, we are presented with this question: What special powers did Moses see in the Sabbath as an antidote to enslavement?

The rabbi of a certain well-known Ukrainian city was famous for always arguing with the Creator in defense of the Jewish people. Late one Passover night, he ran into the square and called an emergency meeting of all the Jews in the city.

"Quick!" he said. "Bring me all your tobacco. Right now!"

"But, rabbi," protested the people. "That is contraband. Anyone caught with it would be instantly executed."

But the rabbi would accept no excuses, and sure enough, little by little, the pile of tobacco in the square began to grow quite large. The rabbi immediately called for another contraband item, and once again, he was greeted by incredulous protests. But he persisted, and slowly but surely, a second pile materialized as well.

"And now," ordered the rabbi, "bring me all your bread!"

This time, however, all his persistence was to no avail. Not a single crumb appeared.

"Master of the Universe!" the rabbi cried out to the heavens. "How wonderful are your people! Look at all this contraband. All the police forces and threats of execution could not prevent them from collecting this material. But one word from You forbidding bread on Passover, spoken over three thousand years ago, and there is not one crumb in the whole city."

The word of the Creator is an impenetrable wall, more real than piles of brick and mortar or a battalion of soldiers. Yet it is a spiritual wall, visible to the soul but not the eye. On the Sabbath, when Hashem commands us to rest and refrain from all sorts of mundane activities, He is in effect surrounding us with spiritual walls composed of His holy words. When we enter within these sanctified walls, we are transported to higher world, a place ideally suited to communing with our inner selves, to contemplating the timeless truths of the Universe, to bonding with the Creator. This is the secret of the magical power of the Sabbath to touch the Jewish soul. Were we to emulate the Sabbath observance on an ordinary weekday, it would have no effect-because it the divine commandment that sets it apart.

For the unfortunate Jewish slaves, in Egypt as in other times, the Sabbath was the perfect place of refuge. By keeping the Sabbath they could escape the mundane world into a transcendent abode where their

souls could feast on the divine aura, reinforcing their identity as exalted Jews even in a state of slavery.

In our own lives, we often find ourselves swept away by the maelstrom of seemingly endless mundane concerns and activities. Life literally enslaves us. There are bills to pay, things to do, obligations to fulfill, a never-ending succession of miles to go before we sleep. But on the Sabbath, we have the opportunity to step away from it all, to enter this spiritual edifice constructed of the divine word and enjoy a day of uninterrupted peace and spirituality. This is the special gift Hashem reserved for the Jewish people, a gift that sanctifies, enriches and elevates all the days of our lives. © 2011 Rabbi N. Reich & torah.org

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“**A**nd G-d spoke to Moshe at Mt Sinai, saying” (Vayikra 25:1). Up until this point, Sefer Vayikra consists of the laws taught to Moshe in the Mishkan, shortly after it was constructed (and some narrative related to them). From this point on, though, the Torah reverts back to things taught to Moshe at Mt. Sinai, before the Mishkan was built. The obvious question is why these laws are included in Sefer Vayikra-and why they are taught after the laws taught in the Mishkan-if, chronologically, they were taught before the Mishkan was built.

Ramban explains how the end of Sefer Vayikra really is in chronological order. The Mishkan was commanded during Moshe's first 40-day period atop Mt. Sinai (when he received the first set of Luchos), but was cancelled, along with the original covenant, after the sin of the golden calf. During the 40-day period when Moshe received the second set of Luchos, the covenant was reinstated, and the original commandments regarding the Mishkan became valid again. At that point, G-d added the "oaths and curses" (appearing in next week's Parasha) to "strengthen" the covenant, and also taught Moshe the details of sh'mita (the Sabbatical year), a concept that had been introduced in the original covenant (Shemos 23:10-11). After Moshe descended from Mt. Sinai with the second set of Luchos, he told the nation about the Mishkan, which they were eager to construct. After it was constructed, Moshe had to tell them the laws that were pertinent to the Mishkan and to the Kohanim who performed the service in it. It was only after these laws were taught that could Moshe teach them what was previously taught to him at Sinai (Parashas Behar and Parashas B'chukosai).

Although the laws taught to Moshe were relayed in chronological order (since the Mishkan and all the laws necessary for it were taught during the first 40-day period and the laws contained at the end of Sefer Vayikra were taught during the latter 40-day period), it would be difficult to suggest that this is what the Ramban means when he says the chronological

order is maintained throughout Sefer Vayikra. For one thing, the opening text describes communication between G-d and Moshe in the Mishkan, which wasn't built until months after Moshe descended from Mt. Sinai with the second set of Luchos. Additionally, the sections of narrative (such as the death of Aharon's sons) occurred after the Mishkan was up and operating. Therefore, the chronological order that the Ramban is referring to must be when Moshe taught these laws to the nation; he taught them the laws (and the "curses") at the end of Sefer Vayikra after he taught them the laws described earlier in the text. And because they were taught later, they appear in the Torah later.

Sefornu says Moshe taught the latter part of Sefer Vayikra to the nation when he thought they were about to enter the Promised Land (since that is when these laws became relevant), even though they were taught to him earlier, at Sinai. These details are given in the Torah here, when Moshe taught them to the nation, rather than when they were taught to him. This is similar to Ramban's approach as far as the chronology (with the order in the Torah following the order Moshe taught it to the nation), but differs based on a different issue. According to Ramban the words in our Parasha were taught to Moshe during the latter 40-day period, while Parashas Mishpatim was taught to him (and then to the nation) before the first 40-day period; according to Sefornu they were taught to Moshe at the same time as Parashas Mishpatim, but he only taught the nation the concept of "sh'mita" without teaching them the details (yet).

Ibn Ezra says explicitly that this part of the Torah is not in chronological order, based on his opinion that the "curses" in next week's Parasha (see his commentary on 26:25) are part of the "Book of the Covenant" referenced at Sinai (Shemos 24:7, see Chizkuni there). These sections were included at the end of Sefer Vayikra because of their connection with something included earlier in Sefer Vayikra: causes for "the land expelling us." Just as we will be expelled for sexual immorality (18:24 and 20:22), we will be expelled for not keeping sh'mita (26:34-43). Tosfos refers to the fact that Sefer Vayikra is also called "Toras Kohanim" (not to be confused with the Sifra, the halachic Midrash also referred to that way), and suggests that these laws are included in Sefer Vayikra despite having been taught at Sinai because of the primary role the Kohanim have in the performance of these mitzvos (i.e. they "declare the years" of the sh'mita cycle and blow the shofar signifying the beginning of the year of Yovel).

Other connections are also suggested, connections between the end of Parashas Emor and the beginning of Parashas Behar. (These connections are not mutually exclusive, neither with each other, nor with any of the above approaches.) Baal Haturim connects the blasphemer with Mt. Sinai because it was at Sinai that the severe prohibition against saying G-d's name in vain was issued, and because it is during the

sh'mita year that sages teach their students about G-d's holy name. Among the connections suggested by Moshav Zekainim is that the blasphemer was not part of any Tribe (since his father wasn't Jewish), and the list of those with such lineal deficiencies (including mamzeirus) was reviewed by the religious leaders every sh'mita year. Tzror Hamor, who had described how the laws that followed the edict to execute the blasphemer were chosen to strengthen the honor one must give other people, connects the need to honor G-d (the opposite of blaspheming) and to honor people with the need to honor the Holy Land (as epitomized by letting it "rest" during sh'mita). I would like to suggest an additional connection.

Toras Kohanim (the Sifra), quoted by Rashi, tells us that the laws of sh'mita being taught at Sinai teaches us that all the laws, including their details, were taught at Sinai. This follows the opinion of Rabbi Akiva (Zevachim 115b), who says that all the laws and their details were taught at Sinai, repeated in the Mishkan, and then taught a third time in the Plains of Moav. Rabbi Yishmael, on the other hand, is of the opinion that only the categories were taught at Sinai; the details were taught in the Mishkan (see pg. 7 of <http://aishdas.org/ta/5768/behav.pdf> for a possibility as to how Rabbi Yishmael understands the connection between sh'mita and Sinai; see B'er Yosef for another possibility). If everything was taught at Sinai (and later repeated in the Plains of Moav), how do we know that it was also taught, in its entirety, in the Mishkan?

The laws taught at the end of Parashas Emor are part of the civil laws. The civil laws were taught at Marah (weeks before the nation arrived at Sinai), and then again at Sinai (see <http://aishdas.org/ta/5766/mishpatim.pdf>). If there were any laws that wouldn't need to be repeated in the Mishkan, it would be the civil laws. Yet, they were (or at least some of them were). This indicates that all the laws were taught in the Mishkan; otherwise, why are laws already known being repeated? The beginning of Parashas Behar teaches us that all the laws, including their details, were taught at Sinai; a lesson made all the more obvious by being included in a Sefer that until now dealt exclusively with what was taught in the Mishkan. When is this lesson taught? Immediately after we are taught that even what was taught at Sinai (and at Marah) was taught again in the Mishkan. It is therefore possible that the laws of sh'mita, despite having been taught at Sinai, were taught here in order to connect the twin-lessons of where the Torah was taught. It was taught in its entirety at Sinai, as indicated by the laws of sh'mita being taught there even though they wouldn't become relevant until later, and taught in its entirety in the Mishkan, as indicated by civil laws being repeated there-and being placed adjacent to the lesson about everything being taught at Sinai. © 2011 Rabbi D. Kramer