

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

In last week's parsha and this there are two quite similar commands, both of which have to do with counting time. Last week we read about the counting of the omer, the forty nine days between the second day of Pesach and Shavuot:

"From the day after the Sabbath, the day you brought the sheaf of the wave offering, count off seven full weeks. Count off fifty days up to the day after the seventh Sabbath, and then present an offering of new grain to the Lord." (Lev. 23:15-16)

This week we read about the counting of the years to the Jubilee: "Count off seven sabbath years -- seven times seven years -- so that the seven sabbath years amount to a period of forty-nine years. Then have the trumpet sounded everywhere on the tenth day of the seventh month; on the Day of Atonement sound the trumpet throughout your land. Consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you; each of you is to return to your family property and to your own clan." (Lev. 25:8-10)

There is, though, one significant difference between the two acts of counting, and it tends to be missed in translation. The counting of the Omer is in the plural: u-sefartem lakhem. The counting of the years is in the singular: vesafarta lekha. Oral tradition interpreted the difference as referring to who is to do the counting. In the case of the Omer, the counting is a duty of each individual. (Menachot 65b) Hence the use of the plural. In the case of the Jubilee, the counting is the responsibility of the Bet Din, specifically the supreme court, the Sanhedrin. (Sifra, Behar 2:2, Maimonides, Hilkhot Shemittah ve-Yovel 10:1) It is the duty of the Jewish people as a whole, performed centrally on their behalf by the court. Hence the singular.

Implicit here is an important principle of leadership. As individuals we count the days, but as leaders we must count the years. As private persons we can think about tomorrow, but in our role as leaders we must think long-term, focusing our eyes on the far horizon. "Who is wise?" asked Ben Zoma, and answered: "One who foresees the consequences." (Tamid 32a) Leaders, if they are wise, think about the impact of their decisions many years from now.

Famously, when asked in the 1970s what he thought about the French Revolution in 1789, Chinese leader Zhou Enlai replied: "Too soon to say."

(Truth to tell, the conversation was probably not about the Revolution in 1789 but about the Paris students' revolt of 1968, just a few years earlier. Still, as they say, some stories are true even if they did not happen.)

Jewish history is replete with just such long-term thinking. When Moses, on the eve of the exodus, focused the attention of the Israelites on how they would tell the story to their children in the years to come, he was taking the first step to making Judaism a religion built on education, study and the life of the mind, one of its most profound and empowering insights.

Throughout the book of Devarim he exhibits stunning insight when he says that the Israelites will find that their real challenge will be not slavery but freedom, not poverty but affluence, and not homelessness but home. Anticipating by two millennia the theory of the 14th century Islamic historian Ibn Khaldun, he predicts that over the course of time, precisely as they succeed, the Israelites will be at risk of losing their asabiyah or social cohesion and solidarity as a group. To prevent this he sets forth a way of life built on covenant, memory, collective responsibility, justice, welfare and social inclusion -- still, to this day, the most powerful formula ever devised for a strong civil society.

When the people of the Southern Kingdom of Judah went into exile to Babylon, it was the foresight of Jeremiah, expressed in his letter to the exiles, (Jeremiah 29:1-8) that became the first ever expression of the idea of a creative minority. The people could maintain their identity there, he said, while working for the benefit of society as a whole, and eventually they would return. It was a remarkable prescription, and has guided Jewish communities in the Diaspora for the twenty-six centuries since.

When Ezra and Nehemiah gathered the people to the Water Gate in Jerusalem in the mid-fifth century BCE and gave them the world's first adult education seminar, (Nehemiah 8) they were signaling a truth that would only become apparent several centuries later in Hellenistic times, that the real battle that would determine the future of the Jewish people was cultural rather than military. The Maccabees won the military

**TORAS AISH IS A WEEKLY PARSHA
NEWSLETTER DISTRIBUTED VIA EMAIL
AND THE WEB AT WWW.AISHDAS.ORG/TA.
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struggle against the Seleucids, but the Hasmonean monarchy that ensued eventually became Hellenised itself.

When Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai said to Vespasian, the Roman general leading the siege against Jerusalem, "Give me Yavneh and its sages," (Gittin 56b) he was saving the Jewish future by ensuring that an ongoing source of spiritual and intellectual leadership would remain.

Among the most prescient of all Jewish leaders were the rabbis of the first two centuries of the Common Era. It was they who ordered the great traditions of the Oral Law into the disciplined structure that became the Mishnah and subsequently the Talmud; they who developed textual study into an entire religious culture; they who developed the architectonics of prayer into a form eventually followed by Jewish communities throughout the world; and they who developed the elaborate system of rabbinic halakhah as a "fence around the law." Avot 1:1) They did what no other religious leadership has ever succeeded in doing, honing and refining a way of life capable of sustaining a nation in exile and dispersion for two thousand years.

In the early nineteenth century, when rabbis like Zvi Hirsch Kalisher and Yehudah Alkalai began to argue for a return to Zion, they inspired secular figures like Moses Hess (and later Yehudah Leib Pinsker and Theodor Herzl), and even non-Jews like George Eliot, whose Daniel Deronda (1876) was one of the first Zionist novels. That movement ensured that there was a Jewish population there, able to settle and build the land so that there could one day be a State of Israel.

When the yeshiva heads and Hassidic leaders who survived the Holocaust encouraged their followers to marry and have children and rebuild their shattered worlds, they gave rise to what has become the single fastest growing element in Jewish life. Because of them there are now, within living memory of the almost total destruction of the great centres of Jewish learning in Eastern Europe, more Jews studying at yeshivah or seminary than at any time in the whole of Jewish history -- more than in the great days of the nineteenth century yeshivot at Volozhyn, Ponevez and Mir, more even than in the days of the academies at Sura and

Pumbedita that produced the Babylonian Talmud.

Great leaders think long-term and build for the future. That has become all too rare in contemporary secular culture with its relentless focus on the moment, its short attention spans, its fleeting fashions and flash mobs, its texts and tweets, its fifteen-minutes of fame, and its fixation with today's headlines and "the power of now."

Nonetheless the real business leaders of today are those who play the longest of long games. Bill Gates of Microsoft, Jeff Bezos of Amazon.com, Larry Page and Sergei Brin of Google, and Mark Zuckerberg of Facebook, were all prepared to wait a long time before monetizing their creations. Amazon.com, for example, was launched in 1995 and did not show a profit until the last quarter of 2001. Even by historic standards, these were exceptional instances of long-term thinking and planning.

Though they are secular examples, and though in any case we have not had prophets since the Second Temple, there is nothing intrinsically mysterious about being able to foresee the consequences of choosing this way rather than that. Understanding the future is based on deep study of the past. Chess masters have committed so many classic games to memory that they can almost instantly tell by looking at the placing of the pieces on a board, how to win and in how many moves. Warren Buffett spent so many hours and years as a young man reading corporate annual accounts that he developed a finely honed ability to pick companies poised for growth. Already in 2002, five years before the financial collapse actually came, he was warning that derivatives and the securitization of risk were "financial weapons of mass destruction," a secular prophecy that was both true and unheeded.

Throughout my years in the Chief Rabbinate our team -- and I believe leadership must always be a team enterprise -- would always ask: how will this affect the Jewish community twenty-five years from now? Our task was to build not for us but for our children and grandchildren. The great systemic challenge was to move from a community proud of its past to one focused on its future. That is why we chose to express our mission in the form of a question: Will we have Jewish grandchildren?

The leadership challenge of Behar is: count the years, not the days. Keep faith with the past but your eyes firmly fixed on the future. ©2014 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"**Y**ou shall count for yourselves seven cycles of Sabbatical years, seven years, seven times; shall be for forty nine years...You shall sanctify the fiftieth year and proclaim freedom throughout the land for all of its inhabitants; it shall be

the Jubilee year for you, you shall return each human being to his ancestral heritage...; You shall not sow, you shall not reap its after-growth and you shall not gather even what was already set aside-the year shall be holy to you" (Leviticus 25: 8-13).

We are now in the period between the Festival of Matzot and the Festival of Weeks (Shavuot). It may be viewed as one long festival connected by the count of the Omer.

The majority of our decisors are strict about the counting of the days. One may only recite the blessing for making the count, if they keep a complete and accurate counting for all 49 days. Why? Ought not each day stand on its own, independent of whether or not we remembered the correct count on previous days?

Secondly, why does the Bible (Deut. 16:10) and our liturgy refer to the concluding festival of this period as the Festival of Weeks (Shavuot)? Other festivals like the Festival of Matzot or the Festival of Sukkot, are named for a ritual which defines the festival, and not for the period leading up to the festival.

And thirdly, my teacher and mentor, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik ztz"l would always repeat the count of the Omer in two versions: (for example), "today is the first day within the Omer (ba'Omer) followed by, "today is the first day towards the Omer (la'Omer). Why the repetition and what is the difference between the two versions?

In order to respond, we must note the striking parallel between the Torah's description of the days leading up to the Festival of Shavuot and the years leading up to the Jubilee year.

"You shall count for yourselves - from the morrow of the Rest Day, from the day that you brought the Omer of the waving - seven Sabbath weeks, they shall be complete. On the morrow of the seventh week, you shall count fifty days, and you shall offer (on that fiftieth day) a new meal offering to the Lord.... From your dwelling places shall you bring bread that shall be waved, two loaves...leavened; first offerings to the Lord.... And you shall convoke on this self-same day (the fiftieth day) a Holy Convocation for yourselves; you shall do no laborious work...throughout all your habitations." (Lev. 23:15-21)

When you compare this passage of the days leading up to Shavuot with the passage of years leading up to the Jubilee (in the introduction to this commentary), you see that in both instances, you must count seven times seven units, leading up to the fiftieth which is holy and on which work is forbidden. The Jubilee is clearly a year of redemption, in which the fundamental freedom of every human being is honored and all inhabitants return to their ancestral homes. I would therefore submit that the fiftieth day - Shavuot; paralleling the fiftieth year - the Jubilee - must likewise signal freedom and redemption.

Although we were freed from Egyptian slavery on Passover, we were not yet truly free and certainly not yet redeemed; we had merely been thrust out into an alien and arid desert without a homeland with our own agriculture to sustain ourselves and without borders to protect us. This is symbolized by matzah - incomplete bread (the staff of life) and by the Omer barley offering, the first of the grains to ripen in Israel and a food considered fit only for animals. We also had not yet received our constitution of responsible freedom, G-d's Revelation of the Torah at Sinai. True freedom had to wait seven weeks, for the wheat grain to ripen and for the bread offering to be brought at the Holy Temple in Jerusalem, Israel. Only then could we be considered free, redeemed and holy.

History shows that for freedom to be properly exercised and administered it must be deserved, and won with hard work. Man, the complex animal, must turn himself into human created in the image of the Divine. This requires time and intensive preparation. To move from the barley grain fit for animals to the bread meant for those but "little lower than G-d, crowned with glory and honor" (Psalms 8: 5) requires the hard work of repentance, the return to the spark of the Divine within each of us.

Hence these seven weeks of counting (sefirah) must be used for self-improvement to bring each of us closer to the sefirot-emanations (characteristics of the Divine). The preparation must be complete - because without it, freedom could lead to lawlessness and mass destruction (witness the French Revolution, the Russian Revolution, the Iranian Revolution!).

Omer is a minimum amount of grain, a "sheaf", barley or wheat grain. By counting using the word "la'Omer" (towards the Omer), we express our goal of proper and deserved freedom. By contrast, using the expression "ba'Omer" (within the Omer), we emphasize the process of the period of preparation. One must understand the importance of the goal ("la'Omer") and properly utilize every single day of the period of preparation ("ba'Omer"). Ultimately, making each day count is crucial, this is the preparation which will define the quality of the goal and which gives the festival its name, Shavuot. ©2014 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

Paying it Forward

Lending with interest is something that (for Jews) is taboo. Hashem demands a certain kinship between brothers and sisters that prevents them from profiting from those who -- through their misfortune -- need loans. Thus the Torah commands us this week: "If your brother becomes impoverished and his means falter in your proximity, you shall strengthen him -- proselyte or resident -- so that he can live with you. Do not take from him interest and increase; and

you shall fear your G-d -- and let your brother live with you. Do not give him your money for interest, and do not give your food for increase." (Leviticus 25:35-37).

The Torah then juxtaposes what seems to be a veiled admonition by reasserting Hashem's omnipotent authority in the context of the prohibition of taking interest: "I am Hashem, your G-d, Who took you out of the land of Egypt, to give you the land of Canaan, to be G-d unto you" (ibid v. 38). What connection could exist between the prohibition against taking interest from Jews and the exodus from Egypt?

Rabbi Paysach Krohn relates the story of a 40-year old man who passed away and left a young widow and orphans. The oldest son, Yosef, took the helm of his father's business as the breadwinner for the surviving children. It was not easy; competitors took advantage of his na'vet and inexperience. One day, in the midst of his struggles, a Mr. Hans approached him with an envelope. It contained two thousand dollars. Yosef was taken aback. "Please," he said, "I am working to make a living. I do not want any charity!"

Mr. Hans explained. "Take it as a loan. When things get better you can repay me."

It took almost two years, but the time came when Yosef was on his feet. He went to see Mr. Hans. In his hand was an envelope containing two thousand dollars.

"I am not taking the money," said Mr. Hans.

"But," retorted Yosef, "you said it was only a loan!"

Hans smiled and nodded his head. "It was, but sit down and let me explain.

"A while back I was in difficult straits. A fellow named Mr. Stein came to me with money. I, like you, did not want to accept it. Mr. Stein assured me that the money was merely a loan, and I accepted it. Within a few years, I was able to pay it back.

"When I approached Mr. Stein, he refused to accept the money." Hans continued his story. "When I began arguing with him, he explained. I want you to pay it back, but pay it in the following manner: When you see someone else struggling, lend him the two thousand dollars. And when he comes to pay it back, you too shall refuse. Then explain to him the terms I just told you. Yosef understood the message and followed the instructions. Somewhere out there in our community, those two thousand dollars are floating around, while waiting to be returned, rather loaned, once again. The K'sav Sofer explains: When we left Egypt, we should have left with just the shirts on our backs. But this was not so. We left with gold and silver from the Egyptians, and after the splitting of the Yam Suf our portfolios increased measurably with the Egyptian booty that washed ashore. G-d gave all of that to us. But he stipulated one minor request. When we take the wealth He gave us and pass it around, we are asked not to derive any benefit from it. We are told lend

it to your brothers without a profit. We owe the Almighty for all we have. The least we can do is pay it forward without interest. © 2014 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & torah.org

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The Mountain of Sinai occupies a most central place in Jewish history. The actual geographical location of the mountain itself is somewhat in doubt but its place in human civilization is cemented in memory. The Mountain of Sinai is no longer a definite place as much as it is a symbol of G-d's revelation to humans and the granting of a moral code to humanity. And the conduit for the transference of that message of Sinai to the world was and still is the people of Israel.

The world is accustomed to the specialness of the Jewish people. It is the source of all the anti-Jewish rhetoric and behavior that has gone before us and continues so prevalently in our time. The world's opinion is summed up in the famous doggerel "How odd of G-d to choose the Jews." It is the oddity of the Jews being somehow "chosen" that drives many of the other peoples of the world to be aggravated and frustrated by us.

So, the statement that appears in the Talmud, "Why was the mountain called Sinai?... is because sinaah – mindless unreasonable hatred - descended upon the world!" And this certainly reflects this viewpoint. It is not the mountain itself that is so important. Perhaps that is why in Jewish tradition the geographical location of Mount Sinai is so uncertain and even unimportant. Rather it is the result of Sinai, the enormous consequences generated by the revelation that took place there 3326 years ago that dominates all of Jewish and general history.

We can also understand the necessity of relating all of the commandments and other components of Jewish life to Sinai. That is why Rashi, quoting Midrash, asks what is the relationship between the commandment of shmitta (the sabbatical year) and the Mountain of Sinai. For everything that is important and eternal in Jewish life, by definition, has to be connected to Sinai – to the symbol and message that Sinai represents. In reality, anything not connected with Sinai will not be of lasting value as far as the Jewish future is concerned.

The distance between current ideas, plans and Sinai is not geographic – it is ideological and a matter of faith and traditional belief. Jewish history clearly shows that those who abandoned Sinai eventually fell by the wayside of Jewish life. Berlin proved not to be Jerusalem and Marx did not end up being Moses. For both Berlin and Marx were prime deniers of Sinai. It is interesting to note that the Catholic Church built a monastery on the summit of what it considers to be Mount Sinai.

All monotheistic religions claim a connection to

Mount Sinai. In its symbolism and message, Mount Sinai remains the sole underpinning of a moral and optimistic human society. It is quite understandable why the Torah emphasizes in its opening verse of this parsha that the Torah is inextricably bound together to Mount Sinai. Mount Sinai is the basis for Judaism – the representative icon that transforms the physical into the spiritually eternal. ©2014 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

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 DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

One of the laws of Yovel, the Jubilee year, is that property that was sold is automatically returned to its original owner (Vayikra 25:28). However, this does not apply to all property, as houses that are within walled cities ("walled" meaning that it was walled when the land was conquered by Yehoshua and "city" meaning more than just two courtyards containing two houses each, see Toras Kohanim) remain with the buyer even after Yovel (25:30). A friend asked me why houses within walled cities are different. After all, if "the land shall not be sold permanently, for the land is Mine (G-d's), for you are strangers and sojourners with Me" (25:23), why is any property be sold "permanently" (25:30)?

There are actually three categories of property, each with its own set of laws regarding its sale. Agricultural land is sold "according to the number of years of crops" (25:15), with the land automatically reverting to its original owner at Yovel. Until then, the seller and his relatives have the right to "redeem" the land, i.e. buy it back at a prorated price based on how many years are left until Yovel (25:25-27). However, this "right" only starts after the land has been used by the buyer for two years (see Rashi on 15:15). Houses that are not within walled cities also automatically return to their original owners at Yovel, but the right to "redeem" it starts right away, not just after two years (see Rashi on 25:31). The third category is houses within a walled city, with the seller able to buy it back at anytime within the first year. After that, though, the new owner must agree to sell it back if he wants to regain ownership. If we are to understand why these houses can be sold permanently while no other property can be, we should try to understand all the differences between the categories, not just this one difference.

According to the Chinuch (Mitzvah #330), the land returning to its original owner teaches us that everything belongs to G-d, and will ultimately end up in the possession of the person He wants it to be in. Knowing this will discourage attempts to steal land from

others (or even thinking about doing so), as it will eventually be returned to its original owner anyway. He compares it to a king who occasionally uses eminent domain to take possession of property from local governors just to show who really owns it. If this lesson is only a "local" one (regarding land that can't be sold permanently), it won't discourage forcibly taking houses in walled cities (since they can change ownership permanently), and it can't be suggested that there's no need to teach this lesson elsewhere too. Indeed, the Chinuch (Mitzvah #340) says that not being able to "redeem" a house in a walled city after the first year is a sort of fine levied against the seller for not cherishing the Holy Land enough to make sure to buy the house back within the year. (In Mitzvah #341 he adds that not letting him buy it back after a year is designed to be an incentive to encourage him to buy it back quickly.) If the "starting point" is that property can be sold permanently, with only some property not being able to in order to demonstrate Who really owns the land (i.e. G-d), we wouldn't need a separate reason why houses in walled cities can be sold permanently.

No explanation is provided by the Chinuch for why houses that are not in walled cities can be "redeemed" right away (like houses within walled cities) yet can't be sold permanently and can be redeemed even after the first year (like fields).

Midrash Tanchuma (Behar 1) compares our being in exile to land in the Holy Land being sold; just as G-d "sold" us into exile but eventually redeems us, so too when we sell land it must eventually be redeemed/returned to its original owner. No explanation is given as to how these two things are similar (is it merely because both are "special" to G-d?), nor are the other types of property discussed. It could be suggested that G-d not completely giving up on us despite our not fulfilling His expectations is being compared to the land not producing as much as we expected it to. If the landowner could get the land to produce more than he can sell the land for (taking into account the amount of work he must do and/or the expense of hiring others to do it for him), he wouldn't have sold it in the first place. (For example, why sell the land for \$1,000 for 10 years if he could get it to produce crops worth more than \$1,000 over and above his costs? Put another way, if it's worthwhile for the buyer to pay that much to use the land, why isn't it worthwhile for the owner to keep it?) Nevertheless, G-d wants us not to give up on ever being able to get the land to provide more than we can get by selling it (whether that means improving our ability to farm the land or our ability to hire workers who can do it for us), so only allows for leases, not permanent sales. This is analogous to our not doing what we are supposed to do yet G-d not giving up on us, waiting for us to turn things around and be worthy of redemption.

If this is what the comparison is based on, we

can understand why houses, which provide shelter rather than income, don't fit within the comparison. Therefore, instead of giving the original owner the opportunity of redeeming his land any time after two years (which gives the buyer some use of the land) if he now thinks he can work the land more efficiently, and having it revert back to him at Yovel, residential houses can be sold permanently, while giving the seller a year to reconsider. Houses that are not within walled cities are often only used to provide shelter for those working in the nearby fields, so must be able to be redeemed with those fields, as well as being returned to its original owner with the fields at Yovel. By the same token, since some houses are purely residential (even if not within a walled city), the seller is given the opportunity to change his mind even within the first year of the sale (as is the case for purely residential houses within a walled city). Once the seller can "redeem" it within the first year (like houses within a walled city) and can redeem it after two years (like fields), he is allowed to "redeem" it within the second year as well.

Ramban explicitly differentiates between residential property and property used to provide income (see also Bechor Shor and Chizkuni). Income-producing property must be returned at Yovel because everyone needs a source of income. Even though everyone also needs a place to live, once they move to a different location, it is difficult to have to move back, so residential property can be sold permanently. Houses in un-walled cities were meant for those who worked the fields (not just, or necessarily, the owners), so have the same status as the fields themselves. (These commentators do not address why such houses can be redeemed within the first two years, but the implication is that since sometimes even houses in un-walled cities are only used as a residence, without any connection to crop-producing fields or taking care of livestock, they can be redeemed immediately, just as houses in walled cities can be.)

Having an ancestral home has many advantages, and having property revert to its original owner every Yovel maintains these advantages. However, there are some distinct disadvantages as well. For example, where would converts live? How would they support themselves in a primarily agricultural society? The same is true of members of a different Tribe that moved from their ancestral home to a different part of the Promised Land. [There could be several very good reasons to do so. For example, when the king of the Northern Kingdom set up golden calves at alternative worship sites for the thrice yearly pilgrimages and prevented his subjects from going to the Temple in Jerusalem, there were individuals who permanently moved to the Southern Kingdom. The same issue would arise if a husband moved in with his wife's family, although he could "sell" his property after every Yovel.] Granted, there would always be a need

for workers, and other skills could be harnessed to generate income. But if no property could be permanently sold, there would be no way for a non-resident to ever be a home owner, even if he could support his family. As Chizkuni points out (albeit not regarding converts or out-of-Tribe dwellers), if one couldn't permanently own their home, there would be little new construction in a walled city (where, apparently, most people lived), including not expanding existing structures, if the person doing the construction didn't permanently own the home. It would therefore seem that, for various reasons, including the need for permanent housing for non-residents, houses that were meant only as a residence (i.e. those in a walled city) could be sold permanently, while property that was tied to income generation could not. ©2014 Rabbi D. Kramer

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. ©2014 Rabbi D. Siegel & torah.org

SHLOMO KATZ

Hama'ayan

This parashah opens: "Hashem spoke to Moshe on Har Sinai, saying, '... When you come into the land that I give to you, the land shall observe a Sabbath rest for Hashem. For six years you shall sow your field...' Chazal (quoted by Rashi) ask: Why does the Torah mention that the laws of shemittah were given at Sinai? To teach that just as every detail of shemittah's laws was given at Sinai, so every detail of the Torah was given at Sinai.

R' Pinchas Menachem Alter z"l (1926-1996; Gerrer Rebbe) observed that Sinai is mentioned in connection with other mitzvot too. Why, then, is this lesson taught here of all places?

The Gemara (Sanhedrin 39a) asks: What is the reason for shemittah? It answers: "The Torah says, 'Plant for six years and rest in the seventh year, so that you will know that the land is Mine'." It appears from here, says the Gerrer Rebbe, that planting during the six years also is a mitzvah, provided that it is done with the same faith in Hashem with which one rests in the seventh year. (This is why, says the Rebbe's grandfather, the Sefat Emet, the consequence of not keeping the shemittah is exile. If we lack the faith in G-d to keep the shemittah, then we also will not plant with faith. In that case, we have no business being on the Land.)

The whole world was created so that we can keep the Torah; when we observe the Torah, we testify that Hashem created the world. We bear the same testimony when we live a life which is imbued with the message of shemittah. This is why it is appropriate to compare the entire Torah to shemittah, as in the Rashi quoted above. (Pnei Menachem)

"Speak to Bnei Yisrael and say to them, 'When you come into the land that I give you, the land shall observe a Shabbat rest for Hashem.'" (25:2)

Rashi z"l writes: This means a rest in honor of Hashem in the same sense as these words are used in the case of the weekly Shabbat (Shmot 20:10) where "Shabbat La'Hashem" cannot mean "a day for G-d to rest."

R' Eliezer Lipman Lichtenstein z"l (1848-1896; Nowy Dwor, Poland) explains: On Shabbat, we are commanded to rest, and to cause our animals and belongings to rest as well. If such a thing were possible, we should cause our land to rest and our crops not to grow on Shabbat. However, Hashem made certain laws of nature, and He does not want them to be violated regularly. Therefore, our crops do continue growing on Shabbat. In exchange, we let our land rest for His honor every seventh year--one seventh of the time, as if it had rested one day each week. (Shem Olam)

"The word of Hashem came to me, saying: 'Behold! Chanamel, son of Shallum your uncle, is coming to you to say, "Buy for yourself my field that is in Anatot, for the right of redemption is yours'." (From the haftarah -- Yirmiyah 32:6-7)

In the continuation of the haftarah, after fulfilling Hashem's command and buying the field, Yirmiyah asks Hashem the meaning of His command. To paraphrase: The Babylonians are besieging Yerushalayim and will soon destroy the Temple, and You want me to invest in real estate? Hashem answers (verse 27), and with this the haftarah ends, "Behold! I am Hashem, the Elokim of all flesh; is anything hidden from Me?"

What was the purpose of Hashem's command that Yirmiyah buy his cousin's land, and why didn't Hashem answer Yirmiyah's question? R' Nossan Friedland z"l (1808-1883; one of the earliest European rabbis to speak and write extensively about the idea of mass resettlement of Eretz Yisrael) explains:

On the eve of the destruction of the Temple, Hashem was revealing to Yirmiyah one of the ways by which the Final Redemption may take place. Specifically, if Hashem will see that the Jewish People demonstrate their love for Eretz Yisrael by buying property to build homes and farms, He will hasten the Redemption. In that event, mashiach will arrive as a powerful king (see Daniel 7:13). Otherwise, he will arrive as a "poor man riding on a donkey" (Zechariah 9:9).

Why didn't Hashem answer Yirmiyah's question? Because the Jewish People have free will to determine whether or not to bring this prophecy to fruition, i.e., whether to rebuild the Land. If Hashem had spelled it out for Yirmiyah, that would have made the outcome a given, thus depriving us of our free will. (Kos Yeshuah U'nechamah p.61) © 2014 S. Katz and torah.org



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