

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

There are, it is sometimes said, no controlled experiments in history. Every society, every age, and every set of circumstances is unique. If so, there is no science of history. There are no universal rules to guide the destiny of nations. Yet this is not quite true. The history of the past four centuries does offer us something close to a controlled experiment, and the conclusion to be drawn is surprising.

The modern world was shaped by four revolutions: the English (1642-1651), the American (1776), the French (1789), and the Russian (1917). Their outcomes were radically different. In England and America, revolution brought war, but led to a gradual growth of civil liberties, human rights, representative government, and eventually, democracy. On the other hand, the French revolution gave rise to the "Reign of Terror" between 5 September 1793, and 28 July 1794, in which more than forty thousand enemies of the revolution were summarily executed by the guillotine. The Russian revolution led to one of the most repressive totalitarianism regimes in history. As many as twenty million people are estimated to have died unnatural deaths under Stalin between 1924 and 1953. In revolutionary France and the Soviet Union, the dream of utopia ended in a nightmare of hell.

What was the salient difference between them? There are multiple explanations. History is complex and it is wrong to simplify, but one detail in particular stands out. The English and American revolutions were inspired by the Hebrew Bible as read and interpreted by the Puritans. This happened because of the convergence of a number of factors in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: the Reformation, the invention of printing, the rise of literacy and the spread of books, and the availability of the Hebrew Bible in vernacular translations. For the first time, people could read the Bible for themselves, and what they discovered when they read the prophets and stories of civil disobedience like that of Shifrah and Puah, the Hebrew midwives, was that it is permitted, even sometimes necessary, to resist tyrants in the name of God. The political philosophy of the English revolutionaries and the Puritans who set sail for America in the 1620s and 1630s was dominated by the work of the Christian Hebraists who based their thought on the history of

ancient Israel. (See Eric Nelson, *The Hebrew Republic: Jewish Sources and the Transformation of European Political Thought*.)

The French and Russian revolutions, by contrast, were hostile to religion and were inspired instead by philosophy: that of Jean-Jacques Rousseau in the case of France, and of Karl Marx in the case of Russia. There are obvious differences between Torah and philosophy. The most well-known is that one is based on revelation, the other on reason. Yet I suspect it was not this that made the difference to the course of revolutionary politics. Rather, it lay in their respective understandings of time.

Parshat Behar sets out a revolutionary template for a society of justice, freedom, and human dignity. At its core is the idea of the Jubilee, whose words ("Proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof") are engraved on one of the great symbols of freedom, the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia. One of its provisions is the release of slaves: "If your brother becomes impoverished and is sold to you, do not work him like a slave. He shall be with you like an employee or a resident. He shall serve you only until the Jubilee year and then he and his children shall be free to leave you and return to their family and to the hereditary land of their ancestors. For they are My servants whom I brought out of the land of Egypt; they shall not be sold as slaves... For the Children of Israel are servants to Me: they are My servants whom I brought out of the land of Egypt -- I am the Lord, your God." (Lev. 25:39-42)

The terms of the passage are clear. Slavery is wrong. It is an assault on the human condition. To be "in the image of God" means to be summoned to a life of freedom. The very idea of the sovereignty of God means that He alone has claim to the service of mankind. Those who are God's servants may not be slaves to anyone else. As Judah Halevi put it, "The servants of time are servants of servants. Only God's servant alone is free."

At this distance of time it is hard to recapture the radicalism of this idea, overturning as it did the very foundations of religion in ancient times. The early civilisations -- Mesopotamia, Egypt -- were based on hierarchies of power which were seen to inhere in the very nature of the cosmos. Just as there were (so it was believed) ranks and gradations among the heavenly bodies, so there were on earth. The great

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religious rituals and monuments were designed to mirror and endorse these hierarchies. In this respect, Karl Marx was right. Religion in antiquity was the opium of the people. It was the robe of sanctity concealing the naked brutality of power. It canonised the status quo.

At the heart of Israel was an idea almost unthinkable to the ancient mind: that God intervenes in history to liberate slaves -- that the supreme Power is on the side of the powerless. It is no accident that Israel was born as a nation under conditions of slavery. It has carried throughout history the memory of those years -- the bread of affliction and the bitter herbs of servitude -- because the people of Israel serves as an eternal reminder to itself and the world of the moral necessity of liberty and the vigilance needed to protect it. The free God desires the free worship of free human beings.

Yet the Torah does not abolish slavery. That is the paradox at the heart of Parshat Behar. To be sure, it was limited and humanised. Every seventh day, slaves were granted rest and a taste of freedom. In the seventh year, Israelite slaves were set free. If they chose otherwise they were released in the Jubilee year. During their years of service they were to be treated like employees. They were not to be subjected to back-breaking or spirit-crushing labour. Everything dehumanising about slavery was forbidden. Yet slavery itself was not banned. Why not? If it was wrong, it should have been annulled. Why did the Torah allow a fundamentally flawed institution to continue?

It is Moses Maimonides in *The Guide for the Perplexed* who explains the need for time in social transformation. All processes in nature, he argues, are gradual. The foetus develops slowly in the womb. Stage by stage, a child becomes mature. And what applies to individuals applies to nations and civilisations: "It is impossible to go suddenly from one extreme to the other. It is therefore, according to the nature of man, impossible for him suddenly to discontinue everything to which he has been accustomed." (Maimonides, *The Guide for the Perplexed*, III:32)

So God did not ask of the Israelites that they suddenly abandon everything they had become used to in Egypt. "God refrained from prescribing what the people by their natural disposition would be incapable

of obeying."

In miracles, God changes physical nature but never human nature. Were He to do so, the entire project of the Torah -- the free worship of free human beings -- would have been rendered null and void. There is no greatness in programming a million computers to obey instructions. God's greatness lay in taking the risk of creating a being, *Homo sapiens*, capable of choice and responsibility and thus of freely obeying God.

God wanted humankind to abolish slavery, but by their own choice, in their own time. Slavery as such was not abolished in Britain and America until the nineteenth century, and in America, not without a civil war. The challenge to which Torah legislation was an answer is: how can one create a social structure in which, of their own accord, people will eventually come to see slavery as wrong and freely choose to abandon it?

The answer lay in a single deft stroke: to change slavery from an ontological condition to a temporary circumstance: from what I am to a situation in which I find myself, now but not forever. No Israelite was allowed to be treated or to see him or herself as a slave. They might be reduced to slavery for a period of time, but this was a passing plight, not an identity. Compare the account given by Aristotle: "[There are people who are] slaves by nature, and it is better for them to be subject to this kind of control. For a man who is able to belong to another person is by nature a slave." (Aristotle, *Politics* I:5)

For Aristotle, slavery is an ontological condition, a fact of birth. Some are born to rule, others to be ruled. This is precisely the worldview to which the Torah is opposed. The entire complex of biblical legislation is designed to ensure that neither the slave nor their owner should ever see slavery as a permanent condition. A slave should be treated "like an employee or a resident," in other words, with the same respect as is due a free human being. In this way the Torah ensured that, although slavery could not be abolished overnight, it would eventually be. And so it happened.

There are profound differences between philosophy and Judaism, and one lies in their respective understandings of time. For Plato and his heirs, philosophy is about the truth that is timeless. For Hegel and Marx, it is about "historical inevitability," the change that comes, regardless of the conscious decisions of human beings. Judaism is about ideals like human freedom that are realised in and through time, by the free decisions of free persons.

That is why we are commanded to hand on the story of the Exodus to our children every Passover, so that they too taste the unleavened bread of affliction and the bitter herbs of slavery. It is why we are instructed to ensure that every seventh day, all those who work for us are able to rest and breathe the

expansive air of freedom. It is why, even when there were Israelite slaves, they had to be released in the seventh year, or failing that, in the Jubilee year. This is the way of evolution, not revolution, gradually educating every member of Israelite society that it is wrong to enslave others so that eventually the entire institution will be abolished, not by divine fiat but by human consent. The end result is a freedom that is secure, as opposed to the freedom of the philosophers that is all too often another form of tyranny. Chillingly, Rousseau once wrote that if citizens did not agree with the "general will," they would have to be "forced to be free." That is not liberty but slavery.

The Torah is based, as its narratives make clear, on history, a realistic view of human character, and a respect for freedom and choice. Philosophy is often detached from history and a concrete sense of humanity. Philosophy sees truth as system. The Torah tells truth as story, and a story is a sequence of events extended through time. Revolutions based on philosophical systems fail because change in human affairs takes time, and philosophy has rarely given an adequate account of the human dimension of time.

Revolutions based on Tanach succeed, because they go with the grain of human nature, recognising that it takes time for people to change. The Torah did not abolish slavery, but it set in motion a process that would lead people to come of their own accord to the conclusion that it was wrong. That it did so, albeit slowly, is one of the wonders of history. *Covenant and Conversation 5779 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l ©2019 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org*

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"God spoke to Moses at Mount Sinai, telling him to speak to the Israelites and say to them: When you come to the land that I am giving you, the land must be given a rest period, a sabbath to God. For six years you shall plant your fields, prune your vineyards, and harvest your crops, but the seventh year is a sabbath of sabbaths for the land..." (Leviticus 25:1-5) The Torah portion of Behar opens with the fundamental laws of Shmitah, the seventh year of rest for the land of Israel, paralleling the Sabbath day of rest for every Jew. During these days, when the issue of land is the ultimate question on everyone's mind – for what is the issue of peace and war in Israel if not land – we have to remind ourselves of the seeming impossibility that, despite almost two thousand years of exile, the Jews never stopped dreaming of their return to the Land of Israel; and indeed we have returned in our generation. Was it something miraculous and mystical that sustained this relationship of a people to land for so long? And if it was, wherein lies the origin of

this unique relationship?

Ordinarily, Jewish law divides along two lines: requirements between human beings and God, and requirements between one human being and another. But there is also a third realm: the requirements of a Jew toward his/her land. In fact, the very climax of the book of Leviticus emphasizes precisely this third realm, *bein yehudi l'artzot*, between the Jew and his land, replete with laws of the tithing of produce, the necessity of allowing the land to lie fallow during the Sabbatical year, and returning all property to its original owner in the jubilee year.

But in order to grasp the full symbolism of a Jew's relationship to a land, and how this land is at the crux of our experience as Jews, we must take note of a much earlier biblical incident at the very dawn of our history, when our first patriarch purchased a plot for his wife's gravesite, paying an astonishingly high sum for a relatively tiny piece of land.

Abraham's purchase of this property does not only provide us with biblical evidence that our deed to Hebron reaches back to our earliest beginnings; it unites our history with a specific parcel of earth, a grave site for our first matriarch Sarah, inextricably linking the founders of our faith-nation with the land of Israel in an eternal bond, within the boundaries of God's initial covenant with Abraham, a bond of eternity!

This purchase of land indelibly establishes for us the special commitment which the Bible expects a husband and wife to have for each other, a commitment which extends beyond physical life and even translates into a significant monetary expenditure. The sages of the Talmud derive our form of religio-legal obligatory engagement, *kiddushin* (with a ring or an object of material value), from Abraham's purchase of the plot of land that would serve as Sarah's cemetery plot (*Kiddushin 2a*). The Talmud deduces the "taking" of marriage from the "taking" of the land. Thus, *halakha* creates a metaphoric parallel between marriage, land and eternity, alluding to the unique and magnificent ideal that we must develop an eternal relationship of love and commitment to our land paralleling the eternal relationship of love and commitment to our spouse.

In order to understand what it means to be "engaged or married" to the land, let's first isolate three elements of marriage, and then trace these elements back to our portion of Behar. First of all, marriage contains the physical or sexual component, called "entrance" (*biah* in Hebrew), which expresses the exclusivity of the love relationship. Second, there are the fundamental monetary obligations the couple has to one another, specifically outlined in the Bible (Ex. 21:10) and clearly delineated in the fifth chapter of the tractate *Ketubot*. Third, the Torah essentially sees marriage as an eternal relationship. Abraham's obligations to Sarah continue even beyond her lifetime, as we have seen, and the prophet Hosea describes

God's engagement to Israel: "I shall consecrate you unto Me forever" (Hosea 2:21). Although divorce is an allowable option if there is no better solution, the rabbinic view at the conclusion of the Tractate Gittin remains operative: "Even the altar of the holy Temple weeps when a husband and wife are divorced" (Gittin 90b).

Undoubtedly, the ideal is the eternal relationship, and even when psychologies collide, biology heals: For the birth of a child, and the eternal potential of this new creature continuing after the death of each spouse, soon asserts the true continuity of the marital relationship.

We find that these three elements relate to the land of Israel as well! "When you come into the land," utilizes the verb whose very root refers to sexual relations specific to husband and wife (biyah). And when we're told to hallow the fiftieth year (Lev. 25:10), the word the Torah employs is 'kiddashtem' – the same term which is the rabbinic expression for marriage. The Torah parchment unfurled in Behar seems to weave a mystical marital canopy uniting the nation Israel with the land of Israel.

Second, no sooner have we entered the land than the Torah instructs us concerning our obligation to that land (much like the obligations a husband has to a wife): for six years we are obligated to plant the fields, prune the vineyards, and harvest the crops, "but the seventh year is a sabbath of sabbaths for the land...you may not plant your fields, nor prune your vineyards...since it is a year of rest for the land" (Lev. 25:4-5). The land must lie fallow every seventh year when its produce belongs to the poor who eat freely from the crops. And, in a veritably uncanny, human fashion, resembling the husband-wife relationship, the land responds to our actions, or our lack thereof. If we maintain our obligation to the land, the land will respond to us with abundant produce. If not, the land will grow desolate, for "as long as the land is desolate it will enjoy the sabbatical rest that you would not give it when you lived there" (Lev. 26:35). In other words, the land will lie fallow and unproductive. Hence, a relationship of mutuality exists between Israel and its land.

Third, just as there is an eternal aspect to marriage, there is also an eternal aspect to the land. During the jubilee, the fiftieth year, the Torah commands that land one may have been forced to sell returns to the original owners (Lev. 25:13). This is called redemption of property (geulat karka). Land remains in the family for perpetuity even when dire circumstances force a sale. The eternal link between the land and its owners is the issue addressed in the haftara of Behar when Jeremiah, the prophet of the destruction of the holy Temple, redeems his uncle Hananel's land for him. Despite the destruction at hand, Jeremiah knows that eventually the Jews will return to the land. God's promise of an eternal covenant is

paralleled in the eternal rights of a family toward its finished property.

Throughout the world, people love the land in which they are born, a love so central that one's homeland is called in most vernaculars "motherland" or "fatherland." These terms are absent in the Hebrew language; our relationship to the land is not one of son or daughter to father or mother, but is rather akin to that of husband to wife or wife to husband. May we be worthy of the land and may the land properly respond to our love and commitment to it in this generation of return and redemption. ©2019 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

This week's Torah reading seems to emphasize that the granting of the Torah to Moshe, and through him to Israel generally, took place at the Mountain of Sinai. Since the Torah does not deal with incidental geographic details, this emphasis regarding the mountain bears study and analysis. Mountain climbing is a sport for the hardy of spirit and the physically fit. However most of us are perfectly content with our lives without attempting to scale cliffs. Yet, in a spiritual sense, the Torah seems to indicate that living a moral and observant Jewish lifestyle requires spiritual mountain climbing.

The Talmud teaches us that Mount Sinai was a rather modest mountain in height, as mountains go. It was chosen, so to speak, because it represented humility amongst its greater companions, such as the Alps and the Himalayas. Yet, it required effort, energy and purpose to be able to ascend it. In that respect it represents the Torah itself, which was given to Moshe on its summit.

Life is never smooth or easy -- a flat plain, simple to traverse. Rather, it is always an uphill climb that many times leaves us short of breath and doubtful of hope. We all know this to be true of our physical lives and it is doubly so regarding the spiritual component of our existence. There is a phrase in Yiddish that says: "It is hard and difficult to be a Jew." Well, like most Yiddish aphorisms, this one is certainly accurate and telling. The only problem is that, over the long run of history, it is obvious that it is much more difficult and harmful for us not to live proper Jewish lives.

The prophets always speak of Jewish redemption as being a formidable mountain that somehow will be flattened and made into a smooth and level plain. What appears to be formidable and forbidding, almost impossible to overcome, a gigantic mountain which blocks our view of the horizon, will somehow eventually be transformed and made accessible and comfortable. I think that that is a proper metaphor for Jewish life generally and for Torah life and values particularly.

It is a mountain to climb but once ascended it leads to smooth going and a level journey through life. The Talmud records for us that the temptations of life appear to the righteous as mountains, and that they stare in amazement at their ability to somehow overcome each obstacle. The wicked, evil temptation appears to be as thin as a single hair that can be easily dismissed.

However once engaged with that hair, one runs the danger of being inextricably shackled by it. So the Torah bids us all to be mountain climbers. We are to steel ourselves against the difficulties that living a Jewish life presents and realize that according to the effort will be the reward. There is no easy way or smooth path to a concentrated Jewish life. The example of Moshe climbing Mount Sinai remains the metaphor for all of us and for all Jewish life till eternity. ©2019 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

The Torah in this week's reading proclaims that a house in a walled city may be sold in perpetuity, but the owner has the right of repurchase during the first year of the sale (Leviticus 25:29,30).

Interestingly, the phrase "in a walled city" (lo—with a vav—homah) is written in the Torah "in an unwalled city" (lo — with an aleph — homah). Rashi explains this to indicate that the law applies to a city that has no walls today, as long as it had walls when Joshua conquered Israel.

A thought related to Jerusalem come to mind. After all, for 19 years Jerusalem was split in two with a wall dividing the new city from the old. Could it be that the Torah here hints to events of contemporary times when Jerusalem with its dividing wall (lo with a vav) will become a city without walls (lo with an aleph), forever one, forever united.

Rabbi Duschensky in his Be-Ikvei Parshiot takes it a step further. The Torah may be suggesting that while the fortification of Jerusalem symbolized by walls is necessary for its defense, God's help is at least as important to protect the city. To paraphrase Rabbi Duschensky, only if we realize that Jerusalem has no walls (lo with an aleph)—in the sense that we cannot only rely on ourselves but on our Father in Heaven who gives us the power to defend ourselves—will the city have true walls (lo with a vav).

And perhaps it can be added, that only when the inhabitants of Jerusalem remove the walls surrounding themselves, i.e., when the religious and irreligious come to love each other, will there be a city that is secure, at peace, whole — walled.

So the deflection from "walled city" to "unwalled

city" has contemporary meaning especially as we approach the celebration of the reunification of Jerusalem (Yom Yerushalaim). It remains our challenge to see to it that Jerusalem never again be divided. And it remains our challenge to forever recognize that it is the spirit of God that makes Jerusalem the "City of Gold" (Yerushalaim Shel Zahav). Indeed, this will happen when we shed the barriers between ourselves.

Then Jerusalem will be what its name means - Yeru, Aramaic for city, of Shalom, eternally undivided (shalem), Godly (Shalom is one of God's names) and at peace (shalom). Only then will Jerusalem without walls become a walled city. ©2019 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 DAVID LEVINE

Hashem Provides

Our parasha this week, Behar, is normally combined with the next parasha, B'chukotai. This often hides the fact that our parasha ends with only two sentences of the next chapter cited. The rest of that chapter is found in the next parasha. This division was done by non-Jewish priests when the Torah was translated into Greek and later into Latin and English. When the parshiot are combined, the difference between the non-Jewish priestly division and our Rabbinical division of the two Torah chapters are blurred since we read from the last section of our parasha into the first section of the next.

The last two sentences of our parasha must be taken in context with the sentences before them and the sentences after them in order to understand the dispute between our Rabbis and the non-Jewish priests. The two sentences in question are: "You shall not make gods unto yourselves and no image and no memorial stone shall you set up for yourselves and no indication-stone shall you set anywhere in your land to bow down yourselves on it for I, Hashem, am your Elokim. My Sabbaths you shall guard and my Temple you shall fear, I am Hashem." As we see, the second sentence does not flow easily from the first. How does the Shabbat and the Temple relate to the idea of images and memorial stones or bowing down to these images and stones? As we look at the sentences that precede and follow these two sentences, it is difficult to understand both the non-Jewish priests' division as well as the Rabbi's division of the chapters and the parshiot.

The section that precedes the final two sentences of our parasha discusses the steady decline in the fortunes of a fellow Jew. The Torah continually uses the phrase "when your brother becomes poor." At first it describes how he becomes poor and is forced to sell his ancestral field in order to feed his family. As his poverty continues, he must sell his house in the village.

Eventually he may need to sell himself as a Jewish slave. In the final discussion he is even sold to a non-Jew who dwells among the Jewish people. In each case we are encouraged to find a way to redeem him from slavery, and where he is sold to a non-Jew, we must redeem him quickly so that he is not influenced by the idolatry of this non-Jew.

The final sentence before our last two sentences in the parasha explains the necessity of redeeming this slave immediately. "because the Children of Yisrael are servants, they are my servants that I took them out of the land of Mitzrayim, I am Hashem your Elokim." Jews are required to serve Hashem, not other humans. This is not spoken of directly when a Jew becomes a servant of a fellow Jew. There we find limitations placed on a Jewish master which would preclude the Jewish slave from doing things which might interfere with his serving Hashem.

It would seem appropriate to group this sentenced with the next which warns us about making any image or monument. Even the last sentence of the parasha which discusses Shabbat observance and fearing (respecting) the Temple could be grouped with the previous idea since its concern is the holiness of the Shabbat and the Temple which are unique. Both sentences also end with a version of the unifying phrase, "because I am Hashem your Elokim." It is clear then why the Rabbis grouped these last two sentences together with our parasha as they rightfully are the conclusion of the same theme. Our only question is why non-Jewish priests decided that these sentences should be in a new chapter and therefore linked to the next parasha.

We should look at the beginning of parashat B'chukotai, "if you walk in My laws and guard My commandments and do them. I will give your rains in their (proper) time and the land will give its produce and the trees of the field will give their fruit. And the time of the threshing will reach until the vintage and the vintage shall reach the sowing time, you shall eat your bread to satiety and you shall dwell in your land without worry." We find here a list of blessings that will be given the B'nei Yisrael when they enter the land as long as they observe the mitzvot. One could argue that the last two sentences of Behar are a list of several laws which should be included in the concept of mitzvot that we must do in order to receive rewards. That would clearly justify beginning a new chapter with these sentences and therefore grouping them with the next parasha as the non-Jewish priests did. Our Rabbis might argue that anyone who approaches the Torah without the intensive study of its words and themes cannot possibly understand its deeper messages.

HaRav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch gives us insight into this deeper meaning. The parasha of Behar discusses the "resting" of the land in the shemita (seventh) year. Though the land is fallow and will

replenish itself, our goal is not to replenish the land or we would not seek to leave every field fallow at the same time. The reason for the shemita year then is to recognize that the success of our crops does not depend on our skill and cunning but on the blessing that Hashem gives us. At the end of seven cycles of seven years we are tested even further. The land is left fallow for two straight years, a seemingly impossible span of time for us to do without raising food for ourselves. Yet again Hashem is there to provide for us before those years occur. More so, in this Yovel year (Jubilee), all of the land returns to its ancestral owner or his family. If one has become wealthy by acquiring many lands, he is now only average in wealth, possessing only his ancestral land. More importantly, if one has become impoverished and forced by circumstances to sell his land, he is made average again with new ownership of his ancestral land. It is through the Yovel experience that one receives another message from Hashem. Wealth is not a true goal of happiness. Wealth enables us to help others. When one succeeds in helping his neighbor succeed that is a true source of happiness.

Our two sentences become the perfect conclusion to the laws of Behar and demonstrate the wisdom of the Rabbis in including them in one parasha. They perfectly conclude the theme that Hashem provides. May we recognize that message and truly understand it. ©2019 Rabbi D. Levine

ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

Destroying Produce During Shmittah

Translated for the Encyclopedia Talmudit by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

The law to dispose (*Biur*-once a fruit or vegetable from the field has been consumed on the *Shmittah* year, one must remove as well all the fruits of that kind from the home) during "*Shiviti*" (the seventh year in the cycle where all fields must lie fallow) is derived from the sentence appearing in this week's portion "and for your animal and for the beast that is in your land shall all its crop be to eat" 25; 7. What is the purpose of stating "the animal" which denotes the animal that is in your possession and then to state the beasts of the field? Certainly if a beast of the field may eat the fruit then certainly the animal that is in your possession may also?

To this our Rabbis (*Ramban*-who states that this is a Rabbinic law and not from the Torah) state that once there are no fruits left in the field, one also may not eat fruits from the house as well. In other words once the fruits of the fields have vanished or spoiled, people living in their homes must also stop eating them as well and dispose of them ("*biur*").

We mentioned above that one had to dispose of the food-How is this accomplished? There are those who state that it must be by fire (*Rambam*) similar to the way one disposes of the *Chametz* before Pesach. But the accepted opinion is that one takes out the fruits that is in the home and declares the fruit ownerless (*Hefker*). Once this is done the owner may then reacquire it and then eat it. ©2016 Rabbi M. Weiss and *Encyclopedia Talmudit*

RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

The Torah states: "When you come to the land which I give you, the land shall rest, a rest for the Almighty" (Leviticus 25:2). Why is having the land rest... "for the Almighty"?

Rabbi Yeruchem Levovitz of the Mirrer Yeshiva cites the Raavad (Introduction to Baalai Nefesh) that a fundamental principle behind the commandments is that "they are to remind us constantly that we have a Creator who is our Ruler." The Almighty gave us this earth, but after using the earth for some time a person can mistakenly think that the earth belongs to him; he can forget that the Almighty is the real owner.

Therefore, there are commandments which contain restrictions to show that the Creator is above us. For this reason, said Rav Yeruchem, the Torah stresses in this verse that the commandment to rest on the seventh year applies to the land which the Almighty gave us. The Almighty gave us a commandment to refrain from work on the land on the seventh year to help us internalize the awareness that He is the true boss of the earth.

This is also the lesson we learn from the weekly Shabbat, said Rav Yeruchem. It shows a person that the Almighty is the one who gives him the power to work on the other days of the week. This is a weekly reminder that we have a Ruler who is our ultimate Authority. *Dvar Torah based on Growth Through Torah by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin ©2019 Rabbi K. Packouz & aish.com*

YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

Virtual Beit Medrash

STUDENT SUMMARIES OF SICHOT OF THE ROSHEI YESHIVA BASED ON A SICHA OF HARAV YEHUDA AMITAL ZT"L

Adapted by Zev Frimer; Translated by Kaeren Fish

"You shall not defraud each other, and you shall fear your God, for I am the Lord your God." (Vayikra 25:17) Rashi, quoting Chazal, comments as follows: "Here [the Torah] warns concerning ona'at devarim (hurtful speech): a person should not vex his fellow, nor give him inappropriate advice that reflects the ways and interests of the advisor. And if a person should say, 'How can anyone know if my intentions were bad?' -- for that reason [the Torah] says, 'You shall fear your God.' The Knower of

all thoughts will know."

Sefer Ha-chinukh (commandment 338) likewise interprets this verse as a warning against ona'at devarim, and explains what this prohibition includes: "This mitzva includes several warnings and exhortations enumerated by our Sages, of blessed memory, so as not to cause pain to others in any way, and not to shame them. They go so far as to teach that a person should not eye merchandise at a time when he has no money. And it is proper that one take care that his speech contain no hint of contempt towards people, for the Torah is very strict about verbal abuse, since it is something that people take strongly to heart. In fact, many people are more concerned about [having people speak to them in a dignified way] than they are about money matters... It is not possible for the Torah to list all those actions that may cause anguish to others, therefore each person must take care in accordance with his understanding..."

As with any other commandment, after listing some of the laws that this mitzva entails, the Sefer Ha-chinukh defines who the mitzva applies to and what punishment awaits a person who transgresses. While the discussion of the commandment usually concludes at this point, in the case of ona'at devarim the Sefer Ha-chinukh elaborates further, noting its extreme importance: "Seemingly, this does not mean that if one Jew comes and starts castigating his fellow with harsh words, that the listener should not answer back. For it is impossible for a person to be like a stone, remaining unmoved. Furthermore, if he remains silent, it is as if he acknowledges the [truth of the] insults. In truth, the Torah does not command that a person be like a stone, retaining the same equanimity in the face of those who insult him and those who bless him. However, [the Torah] does command us to distance ourselves from this trait, such that we do not come to argue with and insult people. In this way a person is saved from all this, for one who is not argumentative will not be insulted by others, except for fools, and one should not pay attention to fools.

"And if some person, by his insults, forces one to answer back, then it is appropriate for one who is wise to answer back sweetly and pleasantly, and not to be excessively angry, for anger is a trait of the unwise. He thereby distinguishes himself, before the listeners, from the insults, and casts the burden upon the one who does the insulting. This represents the conduct of the best among men. We learn, then, that it is permissible to answer a fool, just as the Torah permits one to kill in defense when thief enters one's home stealthily. Unquestionably, a person is not required to suffer damage inflicted by his fellow; rather, he is permitted to save himself from him, and likewise from the words of his mouth, if they are full of deceit, in any manner necessary to protect himself.

"However, there are certain people whose piety

is of such a degree that they do not include themselves in this license to answer back insults, lest their anger overcome them and they become carried away. Concerning them, our Sages said (Shabbat 88b): 'Those who are insulted but do not insult in turn, who hear themselves humiliated and do not answer back -- concerning them it is written, 'And those who love Him are like the sun rising in its splendor.'"

From the above we learn a fundamental principle in the Torah's perception of man: the Torah does not ignore a person's natural tendencies. It does not require that a person suppress his feelings in order to fulfill the commandments. The Torah knows, for example, that it is difficult for a person who is being insulted to maintain his equanimity and not to react, and therefore it does not require a person in such a situation to remain silent. Rather, a person should try to avoid such situations, and in the event that he nevertheless finds himself being verbally abused and insulted, it guides him as to how to respond.

Obviously, it is an added measure of piety if a person hears insults but does not respond to them. However, the Torah does not oblige a person to behave in this way; rather, it takes his human needs into consideration. Furthermore, even with regard to those pious individuals we are not told that they do not feel any anger. Anger, in such a situation, is a natural, human inclination. Those pious people manage to conquer their anger and refrain from replying.

In this context we recall the words of Rav Menachem Mendel of Kotzk, concerning the verse, "You shall be people of sanctity unto Me" (Shemot 22:30). The Holy One, blessed be He, is not looking for angels, devoid of desires and inclinations. He has enough of them. What He wants is for us to be people - mortal, material creatures with earthly desires, but "people of sanctity" -- such as those who succeed in overcoming their urges and directing their inclinations towards sanctity and purity.

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) ©2014 S. Katz and torah.org

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

This week's Parsha, Behar, relates that G-d spoke to Moshe (Moses) on Mount Sinai, saying that for six years you may plant your fields, but the seventh year is a Sabbath for the land. Why does the Torah specify that G-d is speaking on "Mount Sinai?"

The answer is because the Sabbatical year is one mitzvah which proves that only G-d could be the Author who gave the Torah on Mount Sinai, because it is there that He promises that the year before the Sabbatical will provide enough crops for the next three years (25:20-21). No human being would ever write this law because it would be disproved within six years. The fact that G-d chose to display his control using this commandment also teaches us a lesson about our accomplishments. If G-d chooses to give us more (crops, money or otherwise), He can do so by having us win the lottery where it's obvious that He intervened, or he can make our companies and crops suddenly produce better where we can be tempted to take the credit for the increase. It's up to us to see the bigger picture, and recognize the value of G-d's commitment to those that appreciate Him. ©2003 Rabbi S. Ressler & Lelamed, Inc.



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