

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

The book of Vayikra draws to a close by outlining the blessings that will follow if the people are faithful to their covenant with God. Then it describes the curses that will befall them if they are not. The general principle is clear. In biblical times, the fate of the nation mirrored the conduct of the nation. If people behaved well, the nation would prosper. If they behaved badly, eventually bad things would happen. That is what the Prophets knew. As Martin Luther King paraphrased it, "The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice."

(This is a quote that Dr. King used many times, including during the march from Selma in 1965 when answering the question: How long will it take to see social justice? This is now widely hailed as one of his most famous quotes, although King was himself quoting 19th-century Unitarian minister and abolitionist Theodore Parker of Massachusetts.)

Not always immediately but ultimately, good is rewarded with good, bad with bad.

Our parsha starkly sets out the terms of that equation: if you obey God, there will be rain in its season, the ground will yield its crops and the trees their fruit; there will be peace. The curses, though, are almost three times as long and much more dramatic in the language they use: "But if you will not listen to Me and carry out all these commands... then I will do this to you: I will bring on you sudden terror, wasting diseases and fever that will destroy your sight and sap your strength..."

"I will break your stubborn pride and make the sky above you like iron and the ground beneath you like bronze... I will send wild animals against you, and they will rob you of your children, destroy your cattle and make you so few in number that your roads will be deserted... Your land will be laid waste, and your cities will lie in ruins..."

"As for those of you who are left, I will make their hearts so fearful in the lands of their enemies that the sound of a windblown leaf will put them to flight. They will run as though fleeing from the sword, and they will fall, even though no one is pursuing them." (Lev. 26: 14-37)

There is a savage eloquence here. The images are vivid. There is a pulsing rhythm to the verses, as if

the harsh fate that would overtake the nation is inexorable, cumulative and accelerating. The effect is intensified by the repeated hammer blows: "If after all this... if you remain hostile... if in spite of these things... if in spite of this." The word *keri*, key to the whole passage, is repeated seven times. It appears nowhere else in the whole of Tanach. Its meaning is uncertain. It may mean rebelliousness, obstinacy, indifference, hard-heartedness, reluctance or being-left-to-chance. But the basic principle is clear. If you act toward Me with *keri*, says God, I will turn that same attribute against you, and you will be devastated.

It has long been a custom to read the *tochachah*, the curses, both here and in the parallel passage in Devarim 28, in a low voice in the synagogue, which has the effect of robbing them of their terrifying power if said out loud. But they are fearful enough however they are read. And both here and in Devarim, the section on curses is longer and far more graphic than the section on blessings.

This seems to contradict a basic principle of Judaism, that God's generosity to those who are faithful to Him vastly exceeds His punishment of those who are not. "The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands... He punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation" (Ex. 34:6-7). Rashi does the arithmetic: "It follows, therefore, that the measure of reward is greater than the measure of punishment by five hundred to one, for in respect of the measure of good it says: "maintaining love to thousands" (meaning at least two thousand generations), while punishment lasts for at most four generations.

The whole idea contained in the 13 Attributes of Compassion is that God's love and forgiveness are stronger than His justice and punishment. Why, therefore, are the curses in this week's parsha so much longer and stronger than the blessings?

The answer is that God loves and forgives, but with the proviso that, when we do wrong, we acknowledge the fact, express remorse, make restitution to those we have harmed, and repent. In the middle of the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy is the statement, "Yet He does not leave the guilty unpunished" (Ex. 34:7). God does not forgive the unrepentant sinner, because were He to do so, it would

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make the world a worse place, not a better one. More people would sin if there were no downside to doing so.

The reason the curses are so dramatic is not because God seeks to punish, but the precise opposite. The Talmud tells us that God weeps when He allows disaster to strike His people: "Woe to Me, that due to their sins I destroyed My house, burned My Temple and exiled them [My children] among the nations of the world." 2] Brachot 3a) The curses were meant as a warning. They were intended to deter, scare, discourage. They are like a parent warning a young child not to play with electricity. The parent may deliberately intend to scare the child, but he or she does so out of love, not severity.

The classic instance is the book of Jonah. God tells Jonah the Prophet to go to Nineveh and warn the people, "In forty days Nineveh will be destroyed." He does so. The people take him seriously. They repent. God then relents from His threat to destroy the city. Jonah complains to God that He has made him look ridiculous. His prophecy has not come true. Jonah has failed to understand the difference between a prophecy and a prediction. If a prediction comes true, it has succeeded. If a prophecy comes true, it has failed. The Prophet tells the people what will happen if they fail to change. A prophecy is not a prediction but a warning. It describes a fearful future in order to persuade the people to avert it. That is what the *tochachah* is.

In their new book, *The Power of Bad*, John Tierney and Roy Baumeister argue on the basis of substantial scientific evidence, that bad has far more impact on us than good. We pay more attention to bad news than good news. Bad health makes more difference to us than good health. Criticism affects us more than praise. A bad reputation is easier to acquire and harder to lose than a good one.

Humans are designed -- "hardwired" -- to take notice of and rapidly react to threat. Failing to notice a lion is more dangerous than failing to notice a ripened fruit on a tree. Recognising the kindness of a friend is good and virtuous, but not as significant as ignoring the animosity of an enemy. One traitor can betray an entire nation.

It follows that the stick is a more powerful motivator than the carrot. Fear of the curse is more likely to affect behaviour than desire for the blessing. Threat of punishment is more effective than promise of

reward. Tierney and Baumeister document this over a wide range of cases from education to crime rates. Where there is a clear threat of punishment for bad behaviour, people behave better.

Judaism is a religion of love and forgiveness. But it is also a religion of justice. The punishments in the Torah are there not because God loves to punish, but because He wants us to act well. Imagine a country that had laws but no punishments. Would people keep the law? No. Everyone would choose to be a free-rider, taking advantage of the efforts of others without contributing oneself. Without punishment, there is no effective law, and without law there is no society. The more powerfully one can present the bad, the more likely people are to choose the good. That is why the *tochachah* is so powerful, dramatic and fear-inducing. The fear of bad is the most powerful motivator of good.

I believe that being warned of the bad helps us to choose the good. Too often we make the wrong choices because we don't think of the consequences. That's how global warming happened. That's how financial crashes happen. That's how societies lose their solidarity. Too often, people think of today, not the day after tomorrow. The Torah, painting in the most graphic detail what can happen to a nation when it loses its moral and spiritual bearings, is speaking to us in every generation, saying: Beware. Take note. Don't function on autopilot. Once a society begins to fall apart, it is already too late. Avoid the bad. Choose the good. Think long and choose the road that leads to blessings. *Covenant and Conversation 5780 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l* ©2020 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

In the Torah reading of this week, the value of a person is pledged to the temple in terms of a scale measured in money. Now, obviously the Torah does not mean that we are to judge a human being's value this way. The worth of a human being is inestimable, and no two people are the same. Their value will be dependent upon circumstances and their life experiences. Nevertheless, by establishing such a scale of values, the Torah is teaching us that people are to be estimated in a practical value way. This is a unique idea.

In the ancient world when slavery was very prevalent, even in our day where slavery still exists in parts of the world, the value of a person is their worth on the slave market. How much work can they do? How old are they? What are their talents? All of this contributes to a monetary value and the Torah allows us to look at people in that way as well.

When an employer hires an employee and sets a salary for that employee's services, he is estimating

what the worth of that person is to the success and profits of the enterprise of the employer. This is part of the psyche of human beings. It is the way that we look at people; how much is he worth? And we are aware of the fact, that because of this scale of values, some people are worth more than others, at least in monetary terms, or in terms of benefit to those who are estimating this type of value.

The poor Hungarian refugee who came to America in 1938 - 39, but who was an expert in nuclear energy and would help produce the atomic bomb, was certainly worth more than a fellow refugee who would, let us say, open up a dry goods store in Brooklyn. Since this system of estimating value is really a cruel one, the Torah accepts values that are not dependent upon these variant talents or needs but rather on set amounts.

It is a constant human drive to try and make ourselves more valuable to others. We do so to increase our salaries, to gain wealth, power, favor, or position. Because of this, the idea of the value of a person is always paramount in our minds and eyes. We are forced to realize that every human being has value and that one really cannot estimate this correctly. The Torah, by setting an amount, is telling you that the atomic scientist and the dry goods manager, are, so to speak, of the same value, because no human being's value can really be estimated correctly in terms of money and in terms of position. Realizing this, we find that the Torah is classless, it does not reflect elitism or the designation of people of special value because these people are unknown to us. Heaven knows who a prophet is and who is going to be the leader.

The rabbis said, quoting the Bible, that the hearts of kings and leaders are really given over into the hands of Heaven. They are not the ones of value, they are the instruments by which value is transmitted to a people, to a nation, or to a society.

These are important ideas in our time when the value of people is certainly brought home to us. The fact that we cannot socialize, we cannot deal with people as we do in normal times, only serves to emphasize to us how valuable people are and what every person can contribute to society and to the welfare of others. I think that this image has great bearing for our time and for our current situation. ©2020 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 SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"And you shall count for yourselves seven cycles of Sabbatical years, seven years, seven times... forty-nine years... you shall sanctify

the fiftieth year and proclaim freedom throughout the land for all its inhabitants; it shall be the Jubilee year for you." (Leviticus 25:8-10) This commandment to count seven cycles of Sabbatical years leading up to the 50th Jubilee year of proclaiming freedom throughout the land, is clearly reminiscent of the biblical commands we read last week (Parshat Emor): "Count for yourselves [from the day of your bringing the barley 'omer wave offering] seven complete weeks... you shall count fifty days..." from the day after our exodus from Egypt until the Festival of the first fruits (bikkurim), the festival commemorating the Revelation of God's Torah at Sinai (Lev. 23:15-17).

What is the significance of this striking parallelism between the counting of the seven weeks between Passover and Shavuot and the counting of the seven sabbatical years leading up to the Jubilee year? What is the true message behind the daily count of sefirat ha'omer, the period which we are currently marking?

There are three words which express the concept of freedom: hofesh, dror and herut. Hofesh appears in the Book of Exodus (21:2) in the context of the Hebrew slave leaving the homestead of his owner; at the end of his sixth year of employ he becomes (hofshi hinam), "completely free," without any obligation whatsoever to his former master.

The second word, dror, has just been cited in our present reading of Behar, in which "freedom" (dror) is to be proclaimed throughout the land on the advent of the Jubilee year.

But the Festival of Passover, which celebrates our exodus from Egyptian servitude, is referred to by our Sages as zman herutenu, the time of our herut – a non-biblical word with Aramaic roots that connotes freedom. Why do our Sages pass over the two biblical Hebrew words hofesh and dror in describing our Festival of Freedom in favor of herut?

In his illuminating study *Escape from Freedom*, the philosopher and political theorist Erich Fromm (1900-1980) distinguishes between freedom from something and freedom for something. The former—the mere ridding oneself of duties and obligations—will, at best, produce a monotonous existence of boredom, aimlessness, and sometimes even depression; at worst, it will lead to alcohol and drug addiction, wild licentiousness and even criminal acts of depravity. Many societies would rather succumb to a totalitarian regime of enslavement rather than risk the challenges of the responsibility of freedom.

It is from this vantage point that Viktor Frankl (1905-1997), author of *From Death-Camp to Existentialism* and founder of the branch of psychoanalysis which he calls "logotherapy," insists that the most essential human drive is not a search for pleasure, as Freud would maintain, or a search for power, as Adler and Jung suggest. Rather, it is the

search for meaning, the human need to carve out a life of significance and worthwhile purpose. Freedom from enslavement must be linked indelibly with the belief of the individual that he/she is empowered to forge for him/herself a life dedicated to an important goal and purpose.

Hence, our Bible begins with the creation of the world, positing that every human being is created “in the image of God,” with a portion of the Lord on High within the very essence of his/her being,” so that he/she becomes commanded (and thereby empowered) to “develop the earth and preserve it,” to “perfect our imperfect world in the Kingship of the Divine” (Gen. 1:27; 2:7, 15 and the Aleinu prayer).

By reliving God’s primordial week of creation during our human weekly cycle of “working the world” for six days and resting in God’s presence on the seventh, we hopefully rekindle our task to perfect the world as God’s partners every single week! And hofesh in this context is our freedom of choice not to do whatever we wish but rather to choose good over evil, God over Satan, creation over destruction, eternal life in the generations we fostered, dedicated to Go-liness over instant death after an existence spent in futile pursuit of vanity and emptiness.

The word dror is used to express the period of human perfection, redemption (ge’ula), described in our Jubilee year, when all slaves will be freed, when everyone’s land will provide sufficient produce for all, when all debts will be rescinded, when everyone will be returned to their ancestral homestead, when all the needy of the world will be sustained by their communities. Dror is the purpose for which Israel and humanity was created; the society and world which Israel and humanity must recreate in God’s loving partners.

And do our Sages refer to the time of our liberation from Egyptian enslavement as herut, which derives from the Hebrew ahayut, responsibility: the path-way toward the final accomplishment of universal dror, the responsibility of freedom for, the responsibility of accepting the formidable task of partnership with the Divine, the responsibility of protecting our siblings (ahim) unfrrt Hof., the responsibility of protecting every stranger (aher) who is also our sibling under God, the responsibility of going first and saying “aharai” (after me), and the responsibility of bringing the world to its aharit hayamim, the final stage of redemption, the Messianic Age.

And so, as soon as we became free, we started to count; only for a free person does every day count, only for a free person is every day fraught with infinite possibilities of productivity and meaning. We count until we receive our Torah, which is our blueprint for the creation of a perfected world. And you will note that although the Bible commands that we count 50 days –

we stop at 49. That is also why the Festival is called Shavuot – because we are still a work-in-progress, we have not yet reached the goal of the Messianic Age, we still await the Messiah, we are still in the Process, not yet in the Attainment, the era of Redemption. And perhaps that is what it means to be human, to be constantly striving – and growing, and improving. A great Sage once said, “Pity the man who has achieved his ideal; he has no reason to continue living!” And so in the teachings of the Sacred Zohar, the fiftieth rung of the ladder is where the loving Lord is to be found, Alone in Glorious Splendor. ©2020 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

On its face, one of this week’s parshiot, Parshat Behar, deals with being there for those in physical need. A closer reading reveals similar obligations to provide spiritual support.

Consider the following sentence: “If your brother becomes poor, and sells (u’machar) some of his heritage, his closest redeemer shall come and redeem (ve’ga’al) what his brother sold.” (Leviticus 25:25) While these words deal with financial loss, Noam Elimelech relates it to one in spiritual crisis. For him, u’machar is a play on the word ve’hitmaker. In other words, if one becomes spiritually impoverished and estranged from his heritage, a fellow Jew is obligated to redeem (ve’ga’al) his soul, giving spiritual direction.

At first glance, this seems to be a call to what is commonly referred to as outreach, where one tries to convince the person being reached to become fully observant.

But ve’ga’al is circular – perhaps from the word gal, or wheel – inspiring spiritual striving for all involved. Indeed, those reaching out have much to learn from those being reached.

I’ve many times experienced this sort of reciprocity in my own life. For example, over the years that I’ve taught Bible and Basic Jewish Concepts to beginners, I have been repeatedly struck by the extraordinary comments of my students, and their novel interpretations of the text at hand. In sharing the insights deriving from their unique backgrounds, they have in turn become my teachers.

What is true in the realm of learning is similarly valid on an experiential plane. For the observant Jew, for example, Shabbat can become a mechanical experience. But when sharing Shabbat with someone observing it for the first time, it can become a first experience for even the most seasoned Shabbat observer. Caught up in the beginner’s excitement, the “Shabbat pro” is lifted through the spiritual joy of the learner.

For these reasons, a more appropriate term

than outreach would be “encounter,” which describes a mutual interaction in which all parties benefit and acquire deep respect for the other. Outreach at its heart is a reciprocal encounter.

Ve’ga’al as a wheel also takes into account that sometimes the wheel does not move full circle. As it relates to outreach, even the observance of only parts of the Shabbat or the dietary laws constitutes success as such is undeniably an important step forward. A door slightly ajar offers greater potential than a closed one.

Indeed, the goal in reaching those spiritually wavering is not only the observance of ritual, but the stirring of Jewish consciousness, the lighting of the spiritual fire, allowing those reached to chart their own direction.

Inherent in this approach is the fundamental idea of process. Even if one chooses to remain less observant, he or she is fully embraced and accepted in our community.

Here again, the term “encounter” is most appropriate. It evokes how each of us, souls ignited, become involved in a process of continuous religious striving and, in this sense, come to encounter our inner spiritual selves.

Reaching, always reaching, higher and higher!

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RABBI DAVID LEVIN

Ancestral Land

One aspect of Man’s existence is a natural instinct to designate a section of land as his own. We see this in the animal kingdom as cats, dogs, and other “mark” an area for themselves. It is natural for creatures to defend that area from others and to expand that area to partake of the resources and security that this new area may afford them. Man has more sophisticated ways of “purchasing” land. It is not surprising that a basic law within the Torah acts to control this natural instinct and refine that instinct with a proper perspective.

The first Rashi in the Torah discusses why the Torah begins with Sefer Bereishit with the Story of Creation. Rashi explains that Hashem created the world and is therefore the “possessor” of the land and has the right to give the land to whomever He chooses and to take that land from them and give it to someone else. The idea that Hashem “owns” the land and distributes it as He sees fit is crucial to a law which applies to the B’nei Yisrael, namely the law of Yoveil, the fiftieth year.

The Torah writes, “And you shall sanctify the year of the fiftieth year and proclaim liberty (d’ror) throughout the land unto all its inhabitants, a Yoveil it is and it will be as such to you, each man will return to his

“possession” and every man will return to his family. The ibn Ezra takes the meaning of the word Yoveil to be “sending forth” which references the sending forth of the land to its original ancestral owner. The Ramban understands the meaning of the word Yoveil to be tied to the word d’ror, liberty. It is a year in which “every man is ‘carried away’ to his possession, and his feet ‘transport him’ to his family afar off to sojourn.” The word dor, generation, is the source of the word d’ror, freedom. Ha Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch translates the word Yoveil to mean a “homebringer,” as the pasuk refers to a person returning to his ancestral possession rather than that possession returning to him. Hirsch understands that the idea of the Yoveil year is a restoration of the natural order of things.

In the secular world we are accustomed to purchasing land for our possession and keeping it until we decide to part with it. If we must return the land to its original owner, how is this a purchase? It appears that the owner of the land somehow tricked us with this sale. For that reason, the Torah continues with an explanation. “And if you will surely sell (land) to your fellowman or when you buy (land) from the hand of your fellowman do not victimize one another. According to the number of years after the Yoveil shall you buy from your fellowman, according to the number of crop-years shall he sell to you. According to the greater number of years you will increase its purchase price, and according to the lesser number of years you will decrease its purchase price, for he is selling you the number of crops. Do not harass one another and you shall fear your Elokim because I am Hashem your Elokim.... And the land shall not be sold in perpetuity for the land is Mine and you are sojourners and residents with Me.”

HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin explains that this entire concept is a “chidush”, a new idea in the thinking of Man. When a person sells his ancestral land in Israel, he sells the land according to the number of yields of crops that can be grown until the Yoveil year. The buyer is aware of this concept, namely that he is purchasing crop-yields and not the land itself. This awareness prevents him from any misconception that he is now a field richer. We also learn that if there is already a crop in the field that will produce a yield now even though it may not be a full year ownership thereby allowing the possibility of two yields in the first year, the sale of the land is based on the number of yields of crops in addition to the number of years. In that way, the seller may count both last year’s crop which is now ready for harvest as well as the coming year’s crop which will soon be planted and harvested before the end of the year of ownership as two separate crop-years for the purchase of the sale.

The Torah uses the word “sh’nei” which can mean both “years of” and the number “two”, depending on the vowels used. The Talmud uses this second

meaning of the word to tell us that the land must be sold for a minimum of two years. It is to be remembered at all times that ancestral land will revert to its original owner at the time of Yoveil. The implication is that it is considered to be a desperate act if one comes to sell his ancestral land. The Torah even tells us that this occurs only "when your brother becomes impoverished." If one is required by circumstances to sell his land, he must make a serious attempt to buy it back before the time of Yoveil, even if it is the last day before the property would revert to his possession. His relatives may also repurchase the land so that the land will be redeemed before Yoveil.

One could ask a question about this entire process. We have determined that ancestral land is extremely important in the eyes of Hashem, so much so that He enacted these laws in order to return the land to the owners to whom He had previously distributed the land. We have seen that the sale of any such property should be under the most desperate conditions. We have also seen that the property may be redeemed by a family member at a time prior to Yoveil if the original owner cannot yet afford to do so. Why then did a family member not assist his brother before he reached the point of needing to sell the land? Why also did a family member not purchase the land from him so that it would remain "in the family"? The need for the redemption of the land could have been avoided. We are not often privy to the circumstances of other families and individuals that may cause inaction, but we must ask ourselves whether we would recognize the needs of our family members and come to their aid.

We are currently at a time of International crisis. We can be encouraged by the increased awareness in the world of the needs of others and the flourishing response of individuals to assist those in need. This response is often temporary, but it reminds us that we are a community and must respond to everyone's needs. May we be blessed with insight and awareness as we do our part in Hashem's world. This is our task and our blessing. © 2020 Rabbi D. Levin

RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

Migdal Ohr

"**A**nd Hashem spoke to Moshe at Mount Sinai, saying:" (Vayikra 25:1) The Toras Kohanim, quoted by Rashi, takes note of the fact that the Torah went out of its way to mention where Moshe was told the following mitzvah of Shemita, the sabbatical year of the land when it is not worked. It is considered a "Shabbos for Hashem."

It ponders why Shemita was singled out to say that it was taught at Sinai, since all the mitzvos were taught there? The answer is that just as both the general laws of the mitzvah and the details were taught at Sinai, so were the details of every mitzvah taught there. When Moshe later reviewed the laws of the

Torah at the fields of Moab, no laws of Shemita were taught. Therefore, we know that it must have been taught in its entirety at Sinai. Now it casts light on the rest of the mitzvos, that they were also taught that way.

The Torah is timely and timeless. The purpose of telling us that everything was taught at one time is to remind us that the Torah is never out-of-date. Hashem and Torah exist beyond time so there will never be anything that develops later that wasn't already addressed in the Torah. Though people may point to technological advances and say, "these didn't exist before," to Hashem and the Torah there is no "before." There must be some way to address these things which can be found by those who know how to look.

Shlomo Hamelech said it when he said, "There is nothing new under the sun," and this is also conveyed in the teaching of Chazal that "[Hashem] looked into the Torah and created the world." Since the Torah was the blueprint for creation, nothing can come into existence that was not already conceived of, or allowed for, in the Torah.

But why Shemita? Why not choose another mitzvah and teach it entirely at Sinai? Why didn't the parsha tell us that at Sinai Hashem told Moshe the laws of Shabbos or Shaatnez? What was the added message of using Shemita as the paradigm?

One clue is Har Sinai itself. At the time of giving the Torah, Sinai, though a humble mountain, became the most elevated place in the Universe because Hashem rested His countenance upon it. Once the Jews left, and Hashem left, Har Sinai went back to being an uninspired hill of rock. It retained no holiness or spiritual energy.

The mitzvah of Shemita is not an active one. It's one fulfilled by NOT doing something; by sitting back and removing yourself from the process. Nevertheless, it takes tremendous devotion and dedication to the mitzvah to hold back from working the land and from transgressing the prohibitions of benefiting from it improperly.

The message of this is that our connection to Torah and Hashem must always be active, even when it seems like we're "sitting back" and doing nothing. When nothing was happening at Sinai, it was a lump of stone. We should not be like that. Rather, like Shemita, even when we're not actively involved in performing a mitzvah act, we must retain the fire of Torah and mitzvos and know that we're still doing what Hashem wants of us at each moment, even when no one else can see it.

A man once came to R' Yechiel Meir of Gustinin, known as the "Guter Yid," mentioning a loved one who was sick and needed Rachamim. The Guter Yid told him to say Tehilim. The man replied that he had come to the Rebbe so that the Rebbe should ask Shomayim for Rachamim.

R' Yechiel Meir said: "Chazal tell us that if one

has a sick person in his house, he should go to a chacham and he shall pray for him. Chazal did not say 'to pray for him,' which would imply that the Chochom should beseech Shomayim for mercy, but rather 'and you shall pray for him,' which refers to the one who came to the Chochom. The Chochom's role is to guide the petitioner, but the 'work' must be done by you."

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The Mitzva of Vidui

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

The obligation to verbally confess applies in a number of situations. Perhaps the best-known type of *vidui* is the one that is part of the process of *teshuvah* (repentance), when people confess and express their regret for a particular sin they have committed. Another *vidui* is recited by an individual offering a Torah-mandated sacrifice for a particular sin, or by an individual who is being subjected to punishment by a rabbinic court for a particular sin. *Vidui* is also relevant to sins in general. This includes the *Kohen Gadol* reciting a confession for the nation on Yom Kippur, an individual reciting the traditional confession on Yom Kippur, or a person on the brink of death reciting a final confession.

As part of *teshuvah*, a person must recite *vidui* for any transgression he or she has committed. This applies whether the transgression was of a positive or negative commandment, and whether the sin was performed willingly or unwillingly.

Essentially, the *mitzvot* of *vidui* and *teshuvah* are interconnected; for there is no *vidui* if there is no *teshuvah*. For if someone confesses his sins but does not resolve to avoid repeating them, he is like someone who immerses for purity while holding a dead (and thus impure) animal in his hand (*tovel ve-sheretz be-yado*). *Vidui* is necessary for the completion of *teshuvah*. Though a person who regrets his sins in his heart is deemed completely righteous, he still needs to confess verbally in order to finish doing the mitzva of *teshuvah*. First, he stops sinning, resolves not to sin again and stops thinking about it, and regrets having sinned. Then he says *vidui*, giving voice to what he has already thought. Nevertheless, if he is unable to verbalize the *vidui*, he should at least think it.

In Tanach, we find two types of *vidui*. One type is personal. Examples of this are the confessions of Kayin, King David, and Achan. The second type is collective. This can either be recited by an individual on behalf of the entire community (as did Moshe and Ezra the Scribe), or by the entire Jewish people collectively.

As we said above, our Sages stress that if someone has sinned and recites the *vidui* but continues to sin, he is like someone who immerses in a mikvah while holding an impure animal. It makes no difference how many bodies of water he immerses in – he is still

impure. However, once he throws away the dead animal and immerses in a kosher mikvah, he is instantly purified. ©2017 Rabbi M. Weiss and Encyclopedia Talmudit

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Lelamed Weekly Dvar

Parshat Behar begins by describing the unique laws of the shemita (Sabbatical 7th year for all fields) and yovel (Sabbatical 50th year for all fields, when all land reverts to original owners) laws (25:1-34). Nestled among the laws is the twice mentioned precept not to wrong one another in business dealings, mentioned twice (25:14, 17). Rashi explains that the first commandment is specific to appropriate business dealings, while the second restriction refers to verbally abusing or taking advantage of others. Why were these tenets placed in the middle of the Shemita/Yovel laws?

Rav S. R. Hirsch explains that the laws of shemita and yovel are centered around the concept that whatever happens in a given period always reverts to its origin, such that people revert to being equals. In contrast, taking advantage of someone monetarily or verbally abusing them indicates an attitude that one is better than their peers, and are justified in taking advantage of their weaknesses. We are warned not to wrong another and are immediately reminded that we have a G-d, that we are more alike than we are different. As Rabbi Yosef Levinson adds, instead of seeing faults and weaknesses in others, let us focus on their good qualities. Instead of causing pain, let us use words of encouragement. And instead of using body language to make others uncomfortable, let us focus on motions and expressions that bring happiness to others. ©2020 Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc.

DONNY TRENK

A Global Shmita

Have you recently heard yourself asking: "What day is it again?". In this most unusual period of our lives, the pace of time feels broken. Is there really much of a difference between a Tuesday or Friday, or even April and May? Everything seems hazy and blurred.

Yet, many have begun to notice the positive benefits of this 'broken time', particularly as it concerns our stress levels. With a great sigh of relief, we've found the calendar and clock no longer works against us. Other than to a temporary basement office or quick trip to the grocery, we really have nowhere to go. No racing to chase trains and buses, running to catch a 7am minyan, or morning rush to get kids out the door to school. We've been virtually freed from the burden of endless schedules.

Truth be told, this shouldn't be unfamiliar to us, for isn't this the very gift of Shabbos? Every week we experience 'broken time', or more aptly,

'timelessness'. Shabbos is "M'Ein Olam Haba", it is not of this world.

'Shabbos time' is quite different from weekday time. We have nowhere to run, no deadlines to meet. On Shabbos, the clock doesn't reign supreme like it does the rest of the week (to the contrary, in a sense we are the ones who set the Shabbos clock, for we must be 'mekabel' and 'mekadesh' it).

In this week's parsha, we learn of an even higher degree of 'timelessness', not just weekly, but for all year round. This is the mitzvah of Shmita, what the Torah calls "Shabbos Shabbason". On Shmita, society as a whole comes to a stop. Each and every day of the week becomes Shabbos, and the taste of Olam Haba is ever more present.

Yet even further, there is an additional degree of timelessness where the Shabbos concept is fully manifest. This is Yovel, the year following seven cycles of Shmita.

Like the first Shabbos when Hashem was in a sense 'freed' from the labors of creation, so too on Yovel, the highest conception of freedom rings through the land. "U'Krasem Dror B'Aretz, L'Kol Yoshveiha-Proclaim Liberty Throughout All the Land To All its Inhabitants".

This unique freedom, which mirrors G-d's eternal freedom, means each person ends his otherwise ceaseless labor to return home. "Tashuvu Ish el Achuzaso". Just as the six day work-week finds its resting place, its home in Shabbos, so does a half-century of labor on a national scale, return home on Yovel.

Residing in the serene seclusion of our homes, away from the noisy commotion of city life, not only are we freed from the oppressive constraints of "punching the clock", there is also a great relief and freedom from the pressures of "Keeping it up with the Jones". On Shmita and Yovel, the Torah instructs us to keep to our own 'daled amos'- "Ish el Achuzaso"- in almost a sort of quarantine. All we see is our own personal space, each to his own "achuza" home.

"Ki Yovel Hi Kodesh Tiyeh Lachem, Min Ha'Sadeh Tochlu es Tevuasa". In the sacred space of the home, shielded from the pressures of work, passion and envy, we each partake of only our own portion- "Tochlu es Tevuasa"- and are surprisingly satisfied by it. Is there any greater wealth than being content with one's "achuza", finding happiness in one's own unique portion in life?

It is truly fascinating to witness how the concept of Shmita and Yovel, while halachically applicable only in

Eretz Yisroel, has nevertheless found its way "Ad Arba Kanfos Ha'Aretz". Thousands of years after the Jewish people first learned about the great freedoms inherent to Shmita/Yovel freedom, the Umos Ha'Olam ultimately caught on. On the iconic Liberty Bell in Philadelphia, the American forefathers saw fit to inscribe the following words: "Proclaim Liberty Throughout All the Land Unto All the Inhabitants thereof", taken word-for-word from the pasuk, "U'Krasem Dror B'Aretz, L'Kol Yoshveiha".

Human civilization's capacity to gradually progress and grant it's people greater freedoms, wholly stands on the three-fold power of Shabbos-Shmita-Yovel.

Although the nations of the world are not commanded to keep Shabbos (even forbidden from doing so), the principles underlying Shabbos-Shmita-Yovel, can and should be embraced by all people alike by virtue of being "B'Tzelem Elokim".

It just may be that Bnei Yisroel's prominent role as an Ohr La'Goyim, is reflected to the degree the Umos Ha'Olam discover its own path to true freedom. "Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness". These great and noble words enshrined in the American Declaration of Independence, blossomed from seeds planted millennia ago in the Jewish land.

Over the last few months, the entire globe, billions of its people, have intimately experienced the principles of Shabbos-Shmita-Yovel like never before. Labor has stopped. Each person has returned "el achuzaso", quarantined in his home. As a consequence, a taste of true freedom has spread to the four corners of the earth. During this period, society has mostly been freed from its tendencies towards envy, jealousy, and multitude of endless passions. Indulgence in materialism has taken a well-deserved break.

As it so happens, we are now living at the end of year six, in the Erev Shabbos of Shmita. In just a few months, the Jewish New Year will usher in Shmita, 5781. The world over has just begun to pull back, significantly slowing down in unprecedented ways, allowing people to be more "misameach b'chelko", each in his own home, freed from being stuck in the human hamster wheel.

Let's hope and pray that in the coming Shmita year of 5781, the principles of Jewish freedom continue to be embraced and nurtured by all the people of our planet, increasing its taste for a truer, more pure and sacred meaning in the three words Life, Liberty and Happiness, firmly rooted in the Torah's freedom banner of Shabbos, Shmita and Yovel. ©2020 D. Trenk

