

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS Z"L

Covenant & Conversation

Rabbi Sacks zt"l had prepared a full year of Covenant & Conversation for 5781, based on his book Lessons in Leadership. The Office of Rabbi Sacks will continue to distribute these weekly essays, so that people all around the world can keep on learning and finding inspiration in his Torah.

In the final parsha of the book of Leviticus, in the midst of one of the most searing curses ever to have been uttered to a nation by way of warning, the Sages found a fleck of pure gold.

Moses is describing a nation in flight from its enemies: "Just the sound of a windblown leaf will put them to running, and they will run scared as if running from a sword! They will fall even when no one is chasing them! They will stumble over each other as they would before a sword, even though no one is chasing them! You will have no power to stand before your enemies." (Lev. 26:36-37)

There is, on the face of it, nothing positive in this nightmare scenario. But the Sages said: "They will stumble over each other" -- read this as 'stumble because of one another': this teaches that all Israelites are responsible for one another." (Sifra ad loc., Sanhedrin 27b, Shavuot 39a.)

This is an exceedingly strange passage. Why locate this principle here? Surely the whole Torah testifies to it. When Moses speaks about the reward for keeping the covenant, he does so collectively. There will be rain in its due season. You will have good harvests. And so on. The principle that Jews have collective responsibility, that their fate and destiny are interlinked -- this could have been found in the Torah's blessings. Why search for it among its curses?

This issue of Toras Aish is dedicated
by Josh Itzkowitz
in memory of his parents
לע"נ אבי מורי
ר' נפתלי בן יהודה שמואל ע"ה
גלב"ע כ"ח אייר תשע"ו
ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.
לע"נ אמי מורתי
מרת' זעלדא רבקה בת ר' ברוך ע"ה
גלב"ע כ"ט אייר תש"פ
ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

The answer is that there is nothing unique to Judaism in the idea that we are all implicated in one another's fate. That is true of the citizens of any nation. If the economy is booming, most people benefit. If there is law and order, if people are polite to one another and come to one another's aid, there is a general sense of well-being. Conversely, if there is a recession many people suffer. If a neighbourhood is scarred by crime, people are scared to walk the streets. We are social animals, and our horizons of possibility are shaped by the society and culture within which we live.

All of this applied to the Israelites so long as they were a nation in their own land. But what about when they suffered defeat and exile and were eventually scattered across the earth? They no longer had any of the conventional lineaments of a nation. They were not living in the same place. They did not share the same language of everyday life. While Rashi and his family were living in Christian northern Europe and speaking French, Maimonides was living in Muslim Egypt, speaking and writing Arabic.

Nor did Jews share a fate. While those in northern Europe were suffering persecution and massacres during the Crusades, the Jews of Spain were enjoying their Golden Age. While the Jews of Spain were being expelled and compelled to wander round the world as refugees, the Jews of Poland were enjoying a rare sunlit moment of tolerance. In what sense therefore were they responsible for one another? What constituted them as a nation? How could they -- as the author of Psalm 137 put it -- sing God's song in a strange land?

There are only two texts in the Torah that speak to this situation, namely the two sections of curses, one in our parsha, and the other in Deuteronomy in the parsha of Ki Tavo. Only these speak about a time when Israel is exiled and dispersed, scattered, as Moses later put it, "to the most distant lands under heaven." (Deut. 30:4) There are three major differences between the two curses, however. The passage in Leviticus is in the plural, that in Deuteronomy in the singular. The curses in Leviticus are the words of God; in Deuteronomy they are the words of Moses. And the curses in Deuteronomy do not end in hope. They conclude in a vision of unrelieved bleakness: "You will try to sell yourselves as slaves -- both male and female -- but no one will want to buy you." (Deut. 28:68)

Those in Leviticus end with a momentous hope: "But despite all that, when they are in enemy territory, I will not reject them or despise them to the point of totally destroying them, breaking my covenant with them by doing so, because I am the Lord their God. But for their sake I will remember the covenant with the first generation, the ones I brought out of Egypt's land in the sight of all the nations, in order to be their God; I am the Lord." (Lev. 26:44-45)

Even in their worst hours, according to Leviticus, the Jewish people will never be destroyed. Nor will God reject them. The covenant will still be in force and its terms still operative. This means that Jews will always be linked to one another by the same ties of mutual responsibility that they have in the land -- for it was the covenant that formed them as a nation and bound them to one another even as it bound them to God. Therefore, even when falling over one another in flight from their enemies they will still be bound by mutual responsibility. They will still be a nation with a shared fate and destiny.

This is a rare and special idea, and it is the distinctive feature of the politics of covenant. Covenant became a major element in the politics of the West following the Reformation. It shaped political discourse in Switzerland, Holland, Scotland and England in the seventeenth century as the invention of printing and the spread of literacy made people familiar for the first time with the Hebrew Bible (the "Old Testament" as they called it). There they learned that tyrants are to be resisted, that immoral orders should not be obeyed, and that kings did not rule by divine right but only by the consent of the governed.

The same convictions were held by the Pilgrim Fathers as they set sail for America, but with one difference, that they did not disappear over time as they did in Europe. The result is that the United States is the only country today whose political discourse is framed by the idea of covenant.

Two textbook examples of this are Lyndon Baines Johnson's Inaugural of 1965, and Barack Obama's Second Inaugural of 2013. Both use the biblical device of significant repetition (always an odd number, three or five or seven). Johnson invokes the idea of covenant five times. Obama five times begins paragraphs with a key phrase of covenant politics -- words never used by British politicians -- namely, "We the people."

In covenant societies it is the people as a whole who are responsible, under God, for the fate of the nation. As Johnson put it, "Our fate as a nation and our future as a people rest not upon one citizen but upon all citizens." (Inaugural Address, 1965) In Obama's words, "You and I, as citizens, have the power to set this country's course." (Inaugural Address, 2013) That is the essence of covenant: we are all in this together. There is no division of the nation into rulers and ruled. We are

conjointly responsible, under the sovereignty of God, for one another.

This is not open-ended responsibility. There is nothing in Judaism like the tendentious and ultimately meaningless idea set out by Jean-Paul Sartre in *Being and Nothingness* (pg 707) of 'absolute responsibility': "The essential consequence of our earlier remarks is that man, being condemned to be free, carries the weight of the whole world on his shoulders, he is responsible for the world and for himself as a way of being."

In Judaism we are responsible only for what we could have prevented but did not. This is how the Talmud puts it: "Whoever can forbid their household [to commit a sin] but does not, is seized for [the sins of] their household. [If they can forbid] their fellow citizens [but do not] they are seized for [the sins of] their fellow citizens. [If they can forbid] the whole world [but do not] they are seized for [the sins of] the whole world." (Shabbat 54b)

This remains a powerful idea and an unusual one. What made it unique to Judaism is that it applied to a people scattered throughout the world united only by the terms of the covenant our ancestors made with God at Mount Sinai. But it continues, as I have often argued, to drive American political discourse likewise even today. It tells us that we are all equal citizens in the republic of faith and that responsibility cannot be delegated away to governments or presidents but belongs inalienably to each of us. We are our brothers' and sisters' keepers.

That is what I mean by the strange, seemingly self-contradictory idea I have argued throughout this series of essays: that we are all called on to be leaders. One may fairly protest: if everyone is a leader, then no one is. If everyone leads, who is left to follow? The concept that resolves the contradiction is covenant.

Leadership is the acceptance of responsibility. Therefore if we are all responsible for one another, we are all called on to be leaders, each within our sphere of influence -- be it within the family, the community, the organisation or a larger grouping still.

This can sometimes make an enormous difference. In late summer of 1999 I was in Pristina making a BBC television programme about the aftermath of the Kosovo campaign. I interviewed General Sir Michael Jackson, then head of the NATO forces. To my surprise, he thanked me for what "my people" had done. The Jewish community had taken charge of the city's 23 primary schools. It was, he said, the most valuable contribution to the city's welfare. When 800,000 people have become refugees and then return home, the most reassuring sign that life has returned to normal is that the schools open on time. That, he said, we owe to the Jewish people.

Meeting the head of the Jewish community later that day, I asked him how many Jews were there

currently living in Pristina. His answer? Eleven. The story, as I later uncovered it, was this. In the early days of the conflict, Israel had, along with other international aid agencies, sent a field medical team to work with the Kosovan Albanian refugees. They noticed that while other agencies were concentrating on the adults, there was no one working with the children. Traumatized by the conflict and far from home, the children were lost and unfocused with no systems of support in place to help them.

The team phoned back to Israel and asked for young volunteers. Every youth movement in Israel, from the most secular to the most religious, immediately formed volunteer teams of youth leaders, sent out to Kosovo for two-week intervals. They worked with the children, organizing summer camps, sports competitions, drama and music events and whatever else they could think of to make their temporary exile less traumatic. The Kosovo Albanians were Muslims, and for many of the Israeli youth workers it was their first contact and friendship with children of another faith.

Their effort won high praise from UNICEF, the United Nations' children's organization. It was in the wake of this that "the Jewish people" -- Israel, the American-based "Joint" and other Jewish agencies -- were asked to supervise the return to normality of the school system in Pristina.

That episode taught me the power of chessed, acts of kindness when extended across the borders of faith. It also showed the practical difference collective responsibility makes to the scope of the Jewish deed. World Jewry is small, but the invisible strands of mutual responsibility mean that even the smallest Jewish community can turn to the Jewish people worldwide for help, and they can achieve things that would be exceptional for a nation many times its size.

When the Jewish people join hands in collective responsibility, they become a formidable force for good. *Covenant and Conversation 5781 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l* © 2021 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks z"l and rabbisacks.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

I am the Lord your God who brought you forth from the land of Egypt to give you the land of Canaan to be your God." (Lev 25:38) Citing the verse above from this week's Torah reading, our Sages make the striking declaration that only one who lives in the Land of Israel has a God, while one living outside the Land of Israel is comparable to someone without a God [Babylonian Talmud, Ketubot 110b].

Rashi, in his commentary, offers a slightly different formulation: "Whoever lives in the Land of Israel, I am God to him; whoever goes out of Israel is

as one who serves idols." Here, too, the text equates the exile (or Diaspora) with idolatry, but the transgression of idolatry is specifically assigned to someone who lived in Israel and left, rather than on one who was born in the Diaspora and remained there.

Nevertheless, how are we to understand that to have or not to have a God depends on the stamp in your passport? Do people outside of Israel not also believe in God? Is God only to be found in Israel?

Rabbi Yaakov Yehoshua Falk, best known by the name of his Talmudic commentary Penei Yehoshua, suggests that the Land of Israel is qualitatively different from any other land in the world in that what happens to the Jewish People within it is a direct result of Divine activity and intervention. Elsewhere, the major influence comes from God's messengers, so to speak, such as the natural forces of sun, wind, rain and rivers, the stars of the zodiac, and the astrological movements of the heavens. In Israel, God Himself directs the destiny of its inhabitants.

Rabbi Shlomo Efraim Luntchitz, author of *Kli Yakar*, notes that a person could imagine that after allowing the land to lie fallow during the Sabbatical year—and in the event of the Jubilee year, the land would lie fallow for two whole years—the Jews would not have enough to eat during the following year. The fact that they did, demonstrated to them—as well as to the rest of the world—that Israel and her people were directly guided by the Divine, and not by the usual laws of nature, climate and agriculture.

Rabbi Yitzhak Arama, in his Biblical commentary *Akedat Yitzhak*, sees in the Sabbatical-Jubilee cycle an allegory to ultimate world redemption: six years of work and one year of rest are intended to invoke the messianic era that will begin at the end of the sixth millennium when the world as we know it, and the work we do in it, will also come to a halt. At that time, one thousand years of the Sabbath, or the messianic millennium, will commence.

These unique years, as well as ultimate salvation, are inextricably bound up with the Land of Israel, both in terms of the fact that they are laws that apply exclusively to the Holy Land and that all our prophets insist that the acceptance of ethical monotheism and peaceful harmony by all nations of the world will be the result of Torah emanating from Jerusalem against the backdrop of a secure Israel.

I would like to add a more prosaic view to these fascinating interpretations. The Biblical phrase, "a Sabbath unto God" with regard to the Sabbatical year summarizes exactly how our land is different from all other lands: Jews in all lands are commanded to keep the Sabbath, but there is only one place in the world where even the land must keep the Sabbath (six years of work and one of rest)—here in Israel!

The significance of the land keeping the Sabbath is that in the very essence of Israel's soil lies

an expression of the Divine will. In Israel, even the land is literally commanded to obey God's laws! God thereby becomes intimately involved in the very soil of the Land of Israel, something which does not happen anywhere else.

I would also suggest that every other country in the world distinguishes the religious from the civic, the ritual from the cultural. Only in Israel does there exist an opportunity for the Jew to express his culture and the culture of his environment in religious and Godly terms. Only in Israel can the Jew lead a life not of synthesis but of wholeness, not as a Jew at home and a cultural, national gentleman in the marketplace, but as an indivisible child of God and descendant of Abraham and Sarah. Here we have a unique opportunity to express our spiritual ideals in Mahane Yehuda as well as in the synagogue, in the theater as well as in the study hall.

This sets the stage for a most profound vision of the Sabbatical and Jubilee years: when the values of the Torah permeate both sacred and mundane, then all forms of slavery can be obliterated, financial hardships resolved, and familial homesteads restored. Only in Israel do we have the potential to fully experience God both in the ritual and in the social, political and economic aspects of our lives. Only in Israel do we have the potential of taking our every step in the presence of the Divine. ©2021 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The reading of these two sections of the Torah concludes the book of Vayikra -- the book that contains most of the commandments given to the Jewish people on Sinai and for all eternity. One of the central commandments that appears in this week's reading is that of shmita -- the rules regarding the sabbatical year that the Jewish people were to observe when they were in the land of Israel. This commandment, in many of its forms, remains viable today, at least as a rabbinic ordinance.

There is discussion that as the present Jewish population here in the land of Israel continues to grow and expand, there is a possibility that this sabbatical year ordinance will revert once again to its original status as a Torah commandment. But even in its present circumstance, as a rabbinic ordinance, it has strong influence over the everyday life of citizens of the State of Israel. Special arrangements must be made regarding agricultural produce grown in the Holy Land in this sabbatical year, and various ways have been found to enable the agricultural economy to continue to function according to Jewish law and tradition, even during the sabbatical year.

But the idea behind the sabbatical year remains fixed in the minds and hearts of the Jewish people

wherever they may live. And that basic idea is simple: that the world and all its land belongs to and is subject to the will of the Creator, and that human beings are only temporary trustees over the land.

One of the most difficult ideas for people to accept is that life itself is transitory and temporary. We pretend we will be here forever and we live our lives accordingly, even though we are all aware of our mortality and the transient nature of human existence. We are always saving for tomorrow, even when we are quite old and advanced in years, and logically, really do not need to save for a tomorrow that, deep down in our hearts, we know we may never see.

We involve ourselves in future projects that can only benefit future generations, because we believe that somehow that future benefit and achievement will accrue to our credit when heaven balances the books, so to speak. It is this contradictory nature of human beings, to plan for a future that instinctively one knows one will not actually witness in this world, that really fuels all human progress and is the basis for the advancement of civilization over the ages.

All of this is based upon the realization that the sabbatical year imposes upon us, that there is no permanence for anything, and what we do achieve does not permanently belong to us. We are merely temporary custodians of the riches of the Almighty that He has bestowed upon his creatures in this world. This is really the sublime and internal message that the sabbatical year, with all its laws, ordinances, and adjustments, imposes upon us, and makes it a year of renewal and uniqueness. ©2021 *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

Every seventh year, the Torah tells us in Parashat Behar, is the Shemittah (sabbatical year). During this period of time, every seventh year, the land in Israel must remain fallow -- working the ground is forbidden (Leviticus 25:1-7).

In contemporary times, the Chief Rabbinate in Israel sells the land to a gentile, which allows Jews to continue sowing and planting.

The sale is debated. After all, isn't it a legal fiction, a process that circumvents Torah law? A conceptual analysis of Shemittah sheds some light on this question.

It can be suggested that for six years, we are creators on the land. In the process, we could forget our creaturehood and that what we have stems from a higher source. On the seventh year, the Torah tells us, step back from working the land to boldly declare: this world is God-centered, not human-centered.

Thus, the Torah speaks of Shemittah as Shabbat la'Shem (a Sabbath for the Lord), for in that year, the centrality of God is reaffirmed (Leviticus 25:2).

A second observation comes to mind. Shemittah teaches an important environmental lesson. For six years, we work on nature. During Shemittah, however, we are mandated to be in rhythm with nature, to let it be. Even the land needs rest.

Thus, the Torah speaks of Shemittah as Shabbat la'aretz (a Sabbath for the land), a year when we are at peace with nature (Leviticus 25:4).

A final approach. For six years, we harness our energies to be creative in the outer world. During the seventh year, we recharge, we refocus from our environment to ourselves. We contemplate the deeper questions of meaning and purpose – we experience a true sabbatical year.

Thus, the Torah speaks of Shemittah as Shabbat lachem (a Sabbath for the human being), when we reevaluate our goals and ponder the deeper questions of life (Leviticus 25:6).

While the sale of land during Shemittah is religio-legally valid, we ought to never forget its internal message: setting aside time to contemplate the centrality of God, beholding the beauty of the land, and searching for our personal and national reason for being. ©2021 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 JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

Migdal Ohr

"And a man shall not wrong his fellow and you shall be fearful of your G-d, for I am Hashem, your G-d." (Vayikra 21:5) This verse, say Chazal, refers to Ona'as Devarim, words that are harmful, mean, or give bad advice. In fact, this type of harming another is more insidious than hurting someone financially, as shame can outlast the effects of monetary wrongdoing. Additionally, one may appear to others to be giving sincere advice, and it may be harder to identify the misdeed.

This is why the Torah says, "and you shall fear G-d," for though others may not recognize what you're doing to another, Hashem is fully aware of your motives. Perhaps this is also why the posuk seems to reiterate Hashem's presence, by identifying Who your G-d is – the One who is, was, and always will be; the One before Whom all is known.

It is curious, though, that this posuk begins with the letter vov, which is usually a conjunction. Most of the time, a posuk beginning that way is a continuation of the previous topic, such as two sins that are intertwined or two that have some sort of causative relationship. However, the previous verse discusses being equitable in that since a person's land goes back

to the original owner at the Yovel, the buyer of said property pays a price based on the number of crops.

Since there is no opportunity to take advantage of someone in that scenario, as the prices are set and well-known, what sort of connection could there be to the next topic, that of causing someone harm? The answer is shocking in that it reveals a side of human nature most of us would like to pretend didn't exist.

Though in the case of the land there is no way to take advantage of people, some people have an urgent need to have the upper hand. If they can't "win" by making a killing on a sale, they will find some other way to feel superior. Either they will speak down to the other party, demean them, or trick them by giving them bad advice.

Therefore, this posuk says, "Do not harm your fellow in ANY way, even one that does not involve money. Why? Because you shall fear your G-d, for I am Hashem your G-d." This awareness of Hashem is crucial for Mankind in order to act properly.

One who seeks to best another, believes that his success is his own. His perceived superiority is a testament to his own power and greatness. But this is a mistake. One who thinks this way must begin to see G-d for Who He is, the One who makes everything happen. We must abide by the rules, and one should not try to sidestep them in order to stroke his own ego. He should instead focus on Hashem, and not seek to cause harm or denigration of any sort, even if he [thinks he] is the only one who knows about it.

A Lesson Can Be Learned From: A Charedi woman came to ask R' Chaim Kanievsky Shlit"a a shailah about her father who had just died the day before. She said that her father was not religious, and he had written in his will that he wished to be cremated. She wished to know what to do, since Chazal say that it is a mitzvah to fulfill the wishes of the deceased.

R' Chaim shocked those who were present, answering that they could allow him to be cremated as he had written. When the woman and her family left, R' Chaim was asked to explain his Psak. R' Chaim replied that one who wished to be cremated has thereby denied Techias HaMeisim, has no portion in Olam HaBa, and is deemed to be a non-Jew.

"But the woman asking is Charedi!" R' Chaim said, "Yes, because her mother is presumably a Jew. But her father is not, and therefore, there is no reason not to do as he asked". [How careful we must be to keep Hashem's will within our focus!] h/t R. Leibi Sternberg © 2021 Rabbi J. Gewirtz and Migdal Ohr

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The Mitzva of Confession

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 AVROHOM LEVENTHAL

Put Them in Their Place

The time has come to put the needy in their proper place. Imagine the following: On a chilly winter evening there is a knock at your door. You answer and are greeted by Shmuel, a regular visitor, who asks for tzedaka. You reach into your pocket and hand Shmuel a 20 shekel note. He thanks you, blesses you and turns away in his quest for the next open door. As you return inside, warmth in the impression that you

have made Shmuel happy gives you a feeling of pride and accomplishment. He will have his next meal or perhaps get closer to paying his rent this month. What a mitzvah!

But...what about Shmuel? How is he really feeling? Is his heart singing as well? Is he “happy?”

The answer is that for most of the “Shmuels” who approach us, the good feeling isn’t mutual. Embarrassment and humiliation in having to ask to cover even the most basic of needs, are not things that cause happiness.

The status of “beggar” casts a pall on them and their families.

If this is how we look at helping others,... ummmm “Houston, we have a problem.”

Yes, giving tzedaka is a very important mitzvah. As the Ramabam writes (Laws of Gifts to the Poor 10:1), it is the most important of all of the positive commandments. Are we performing it to the best of our (and perhaps the recipient’s) ability?

The good feelings from tzedaka should be for the recipient. Not a temporary “feel good” but a potential for real change that will eventually lead to not needing further help.

While we want, and even need, to help another for now, why would we be satisfied in perpetuating a situation that is not ideal for the recipient?

What is the ideal way to perform this essential mitzvah?

One of the principle sources of tzedaka comes from this week’s Parsha, Behar (Vayikra 25:35): וְכִי-יִמְוָה אָחִיךָ, וַיִּמָּטֵה יָדָיו עִמָּךְ-וַיִּהְיֶה צָרָתוֹ בְּךָ, גָּר וְתוֹשֵׁב וְחֵי עִמָּךְ

If your brother becomes destitute and his hand falters beside you, you shall strengthen him so that he can live with you.

When giving charity to another, it should be with the goal to strengthen that person in order that he/she can “live with you”, i.e. be on your “level”. When someone asks from another, no matter where he is physically, by nature he feels as if he is “lower on the totem pole” who needs to receive from another.

Our tzedaka should be a hand up rather than just a “handout”. By helping someone find a job, start a business or improve their finances, we can dramatically change the life of the recipient. The ability to provide for oneself lifts a burden from the community while elevating the recipient to a level of dignity and honor.

This is why the Rambam (Maimonides) famously says: מַעֲלָה מֵעֲלֹת יֵשׁ בְּצַדָּקָה זֶה לְמַעֲלָה מִזֶּה. מַעֲלָה לִּגְדֻלָּה שְׂאִין לְמַעֲלָה מִמֶּנָּה זֶה הַמַּחְזִיק בְּיַד יִשְׂרָאֵל שֶׁמֶךְ וְנוֹתֵן לוֹ מִתְּנָה אוֹ הַלְוָאָה אוֹ עוֹשֶׂה עִמּוֹ שְׂתִפּוֹת אוֹ מַמְצִיא לוֹ מְלָאכָה כְּדִי לְחַזֵּק אֶת יָדוֹ עַד שֶׁלֹּא יִצְטָרֵךְ לְבָרִיּוֹת לְשָׂאֵל. וְעַל זֶה נֶאֱמַר (וַיִּקְרָא כַּהֲנֵן הַלֵּל) “וַיִּהְיֶה צָרָתוֹ בְּךָ גָּר וְתוֹשֵׁב וְחֵי עִמָּךְ” כְּלוֹמֵר הַחֲזִק בּוֹ עַד שֶׁלֹּא יִפֹּל וְיִצְטָרֵךְ!

There are eight levels of tzedakah, each one greater than the other. The greatest level, higher than all the rest, is to fortify a fellow Jew and give him a gift,

a loan, form with him a partnership, or find work for him, until he is strong enough so that he does not need to ask others [for sustenance]. Of this it is said, (Lev. 25:35) "If your brother, becomes destitute..."

This paragon of charity takes time and creativity in addition to money. It is an investment in another person with limitless dividends. We can empower them to change generations. True charity is concern for today and tomorrow.

Yes, we should also give for the here and now. We must recognize it however, as a "band-aid" and not the solution. It is feeding the person as they take the time to learn how to fish.

The purpose in giving to another should be to move them into a better place. A place of honor and pride in which extra assistance is not needed. A place where they can provide for themselves and their families and live with you. ©2021 Rabbi A. Leventhal, noted educator and speaker, is the Executive Director at *Lema'an Achai lemaanachai.org*

RABBI DAVID LEVIN

The Land Will Rest

This year of Covid has been a difficult one for most people. Our concern has not only been for those who have lost family members, but also for those who survived but have lost jobs, businesses, homes, and livelihoods. We have seen communities join together to provide food and shelter for everyone affected. We have seen governments helping with numerous forms of assistance, but for many people this has not been enough. If we were now told that this loss would become a regular occurrence every seven years, a year in which our livelihood would be in doubt, a year in which our families might starve and depend on others for food, a year of uncertainties, how would we react? If we were to see that this danger might come only from our following the Laws of Hashem, would we still choose strict obedience?

The concept of the Shemittah year, each Seventh Year in which the land was to lay fallow, is found in Parashat Behar. "Speak to the B'nei Yisrael and say to them, 'When you come into the land that I will give you, the land shall observe a Shabbat rest for Hashem. For six years you may sow your field and for six years you may prune your vineyard; and you may gather your crop. But the seventh year will be a complete rest for the land, a Shabbat for Hashem; your field you shall not sow and your vineyard you shall not prune. The aftergrowth of your harvest you shall not reap and the grapes you had set aside for yourself you shall not pick; it shall be a year of rest for the land. The Sabbath produce of the land shall be yours to eat, for you, for your slave, and for your maidservant; and for your laborer, and for your resident who dwell among you. And for your animal and for the beast that is in your land shall all its crop be to eat.'"

The Shemittah year is directly tied to Shabbat in this paragraph. In last week's drasha, we discussed the idea of Shabbat as it applied to the completion of one week after the birth of a male child or after the birth of an animal, before the circumcision of the male child or the permitted use of the animal as an offering to Hashem. The Ba'al HaTurim explained that the completed week acted to sanctify Hashem, as Hashem rested on the Seventh Day. Just as a Seventh Day was needed to sanctify Hashem in these cases, so the Seventh Year sanctified both Hashem and the Land. Rashi adds the idea that "a Shabbat rest for Hashem" is for the sake of Hashem, just as the rest that is mentioned in the Creation of the world. It is not that Hashem needed the rest, but that the world needed the rest much as the land here needed the rest to recognize Hashem's creation of and ownership of the land.

HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin explains that the land is worked in two distinct ways: (1) Man plants, fertilizes, weeds, all of which act to improve the land, and (2) Man harvests and takes from the land that which he has sown, an act which is not for the benefit of the land but for himself. Both of these actions are forbidden in the Shemittah Year. For that reason, the Torah calls this year Shabbat Shabbaton, a term used only to describe Shabbat and Yom Kippur. HaRav Sorotzkin clarifies that the use of the word Shabbaton makes it unlike any of the other festivals (*yamim tovim*) of the year, which are never designated by the word Shabbaton. Certain actions which are forbidden on Shabbat are permitted on a festival. These center around the needs for *ochel nefesh*, food. On Shabbat, cooking and many other food preparation activities may not be done as the day is entirely returned to Hashem. All cooking must be done prior to Shabbat. The use of Shabbaton in our paragraph about Shemittah indicates that we may not benefit even from that which grows wild or from vegetation which reseeded itself naturally. Fruits, which are not planted each season, are considered free to all on a daily family supply only.

The uncertainty of the Shemittah year is compounded in the seventh, seventh year. The Torah describes the forty-ninth year as a Shemittah year but then adds a concluding year of the cycle, the fiftieth year (*Yovel*, Jubilee) during which the same laws of Shemittah apply. The forty-ninth and fiftieth years make two straight years during which no planting or harvesting could take place. This additional year created an even greater strain on this agricultural society and should have caused a financial disaster for all those who were willing to follow Hashem's Laws. Yet here we find a promise from Hashem, "You shall perform My decrees, and observe My ordinances and perform them; then you shall dwell securely on the land. And the land will give its fruit and you will eat your fill; you will dwell securely upon it. And if you will

say, 'What will we eat in the seventh year? – behold! we will not sow and not gather in our crops!' I will ordain My blessing for you in the sixth year and it will yield a crop sufficient for the three-year period. You will sow in the eighth year, but you will eat from the old crop; until the ninth year, until the arrival of its crop, you will eat the old."

HaRav Sorotzkin explains the opening words of our section. Two terms are used, one grammatically harsh (dabeir, speak) and one grammatically soft (v'amarta, and you will say). The Torah begins with the harsh statement, "your field you shall not sow...", and concludes with the soft statement, "I will ordain My blessing ... and it will yield a crop sufficient for a three-year period." HaRav Sorotzkin tells us that the harsher language preceded the softer language because there might have been some people who would say that the yield of the sixth year was insufficient for them and would then complain that the seventh year need not be observed. Still the Torah makes clear that a proof would precede the test, so how could anyone doubt that Hashem had given them a sufficient amount? Yet this is not the first such proof before the test in which some failed. Hashem delivered a double portion of Manna on the sixth day, and Moshe informed the people that this meant that there would be no portion on the seventh day. Still, "It happened on the seventh day that some of the people went out to gather, and they did not find."

What, then, is the lesson of the sixth day and the sixth year? Everything stems from the meaning of sufficient. The wise men tell us, "Who is rich? One who is satisfied with his portion." What fell on the sixth day and what grew on the sixth year need not have been double or triple the amount of other days or years. What Hashem provided was sufficient to satisfy each person's needs according to his faith in Hashem. Those that continued to search or to plant were only those who lacked "sufficient" faith that Hashem would provide for their needs.

Our lives change when we place our trust in Hashem as our Provider. We may not have wealth, yet we are never poor. May we learn to appreciate all that Hashem does for us. © 2021 Rabbi D. Levin

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Lelamed Weekly Dvar

If a fellow Jew becomes desperate enough to become a slave, we are commanded not to work him with slave labor (25:39). If having a Jewish slave does not allow us to treat them as slaves, why does the option even exist? Also, as a nation that knows first hand the horrors of slavery, why does the concept of slavery even exist in Judaism?

The Rambam explains (Guide To The Perplexed) that all processes in nature are gradual and that it would be impossible to suddenly discontinue

things that the world was accustomed to. Instead, G-d limited and humanized the practice until humankind would decide to abolish slavery of their own choice. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks submits that this was done by changing slavery from a condition to a circumstance, from what I am to a situation in which I find myself now, but not forever. If someone was reduced to slavery, it was a temporary situation, not an identity. We work to enjoy and appreciate our freedom, and the depth of our history gives us the perspective to acknowledge and value the freedoms we have today. ©2021 Rabbi S. Ressler & Lelamed, Inc.

RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ Z"L

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

The Torah states: "And when you sell anything to your neighbor or buy from your neighbor, you shall not cheat one another" (Leviticus 25:14). The Sforno (to verse 17) comments that the Almighty is G-d of the buyer and G-d of the seller and He does not want anyone to cheat a buyer or a seller.

When selling something to another person or when buying from someone, if you keep in mind that the Creator is also that person's G-d you will be very careful not to deceive him in any manner. If the son of an emperor or of a president of a powerful nation would purchase something from you or sell you something, you would be extremely careful not to cheat him. Either you would have respect for his father and out of that respect you would be honest with him or you would fear retribution if you would deceive him -- and his father found out!

This should be our attitude in our monetary dealings with other people. The Almighty is their Heavenly Father and He commands you to be honest with them. Either out of respect for the Almighty or out of fear of Him, you should be meticulously careful not to cheat another person in any way. *Dvar Torah based on Growth Through Torah by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin. ©2015 Rabbi K. Packouz & aish.com*

