

Summary

BEHAR

The Torah commands the cessation of farming the Land of Israel every seven years. This "Shabbos" for the land is called *Shmittah*. (5754 was a *Shmittah* year in Israel.) After every seventh *Shmittah*, the fiftieth year, *Yovel* (Jubilee), is announced with the sounds of the shofar on Yom Kippur; this was also a year for the land to lie fallow. Hashem promises to provide a bumper crop prior to the *Shmittah* and *Yovel* years to sustain the Jewish people. In the year of *Yovel*, all land is returned to its original division from the time of Joshua, and all Jewish indentured servants are freed, even if they have not completed their six years of work. A Jewish indentured servant may not be given any demeaning, unnecessary or excessively difficult work, and may not be sold in the public market. The price of his labor must be calculated according to the amount of time remaining until he will automatically become free. The price of land is similarly calculated. Should anyone sell his ancestral land, he has the right to redeem it after two years. If a house in a walled city is sold, the right of redemption is limited to only the first year after the sale. The Levites' cities belong to them forever. The Jewish People are forbidden to take advantage of each other by lending or borrowing with interest. Family members should redeem any relative who was sold as an indentured servant as a result of impoverishment.

BECHUKOSAI

The Torah promises prosperity for the Bnei Yisrael if they will follow Hashem's commandments. However, if they fail to live up to the responsibility of being the Chosen People, then chilling punishments will result. The Torah details the harsh historical process that will fall upon them when Divine protection is removed. These punishments, whose purpose is to bring Yisrael to repent, will be in seven stages, each more severe than the last. *Sefer Vayikra*, The Book of Leviticus, concludes with a detailed description of *Erachin* – the process by which someone can make a vow to give to the *Beis Hamikdash* the equivalent monetary value of a person, an animal, or property.

Commentaries

FATHERS OF INVENTION

"...on Mount Sinai..." (25:1)

An imaginary conversation — "Sol: Let's invent a religion. In this religion we tell people that every seven years they have to stop working the fields, down tools, do no planting or harvesting. But we promise them that they'll miraculously get a bumper crop the year before, in the sixth year, which will keep them going for that year, and the next year *and* the eighth year."
"Irv - Are you crazy?! How can you predict the future?! Your religion is going to fall flat on its face in its first seventh year when everyone starts starving and there's no bumper crop and nothing to eat!"
This week's Parsha starts with the words "*And Hashem spoke to Moshe on Mount Sinai...*" Why, specifically, does the Torah record that it was *on Mount Sinai* that Hashem told Moshe about the mitzvah of *Shmittah*. Weren't all the *mitzvos* told to Moshe on Sinai? The reason that the Torah connects Mount Sinai specifically with the mitzvah of *Shmittah* is to tell us that just as *Shmittah* provides a verifiable test of the Torah's veracity (for it would be impossible to invent a religion with such a commandment), similarly the rest of the Torah, *which was given on Sinai*, is authentic in both its generalities and specifics.
(Based on Rashi and the Chasam Sofer)

ECO-LOGICAL

"...The land shall observe a Shabbos to Hashem..." (25:2)

When the Jewish People were enslaved in Egypt, Moshe went to Pharaoh and tricked him into lightening the work-load of the Children of Israel. He pointed out to Pharaoh that if you work slaves without rest, eventually they die. And so, under the guise of giving Pharaoh advice how to increase production, he suggested that Pharaoh give the Jewish People one day off a week. Pharaoh adopted his advice, and allowed Moshe to choose the day. When subsequently Hashem gave the commandment that Shabbos was to be a day of rest, Moses was happy that he had anticipated which day was the day of rest. In other words, the Jewish People had Shabbos in Egypt, but it was only as a respite from the back-breaking work, not as a commandment. However, when Hashem *commanded* the mitzvah of Shabbos: "You will *observe* my Shabbos", then Israel rests on Shabbos, not because we need a rest, but only and entirely because it is the will of Hashem.
We find a similar idea in this week's Parsha: "...*The land shall observe a Shabbos to Hashem...*" In the seventh year when we let the fields of Eretz Yisrael lie fallow, it is not to give them a rest, to improve their performance and allow the ecological processes to rejuvenate them. Rather, we let the fields lie fallow only because it is a command of Hashem.

(Kedushas Levi)

FIXING THE ROYAL APPLE

“If you will walk in my statutes and you will guard my mitzvos” (26:1)

“...that you should be laborers in Torah.”

When you come before the king to ask him for a request to be granted, you stand before him in fear and trembling. However if you're the electrician and you have to go into the throne-room to fix the royal computer or the royal telephone, you behave in a normal fashion and go about your work as you would do in any other place. For, if you were to behave with the fear of someone coming before the king with a request, you would never be able to get your work done.

If you dedicate your hours to learning and wrestling with the complexities of the Torah, then you become to Hashem like that workman fixing appliances in the throne-room of the king. You can behave with a certain freedom, for 'You will not find a free man except one who is involved with the Torah.'

However, if you dedicate your life to material pursuits, *even if you do this altruistically*, then you will have to conduct yourself with the fear and trembling of a supplicant in front of an all-powerful monarch. For you will need to be constantly on your guard against acting out of self-interest and aggrandizement. It will require tremendous effort to ensure that all your actions are really 'kosher.'

(Rabbi Moshe-Leib from Sasov z"l in *Mayana Shel Torah*)

THE CRITICAL MASS

“But despite all this, while they will be in the land of their enemies, I will not be revolted by them nor will have I rejected them to obliterate them, to annul My covenant with them – for I am Hashem, their G-d.” (26:44)

'He who thinks that Berlin is Jerusalem...there will come a thunderous and violent wind that will uproot him from his source.' These words, written by Rav Meir Simcha, the Ohr Somayach, are an uncanny prediction of the storm which was to engulf Europe a number of years later. From the moment of Hashem's irreversible covenant with Avraham *Avinu*, the survival of the Jewish People becomes a natural imperative, no less than the rising of the sun or the flowing and ebbing of the tides. Anti-Semitism is placed into nature with its sole purpose to prevent the Jewish People from disappearing into the melting pot amongst the nations, and 'annulling' the irreversible covenant with Avraham *Avinu*. Assimilation is like a nuclear chain reaction - when a certain *critical mass* is reached, then the atom bomb of anti-Semitism results. There was no nation that represented the summit of culture and refinement more than pre-war Germany, and yet within a few short years it turned into a savage animal. When the Jewish People forget their purpose to be a holy nation, separated from the other nations, then the non-Jewish world will turn around and remind them of their purpose, and the degree of the ferocity of that reminder will depend on the determination of the Jew to assimilate and disappear.

Haftorah: Yirmiyahu 16:19 - 17:14

GILT-EDGED SECURITY

“Blessed is the man who will trust in Hashem, and Hashem will become his security.” (17:7)

“Rabbi” said the disgruntled congregant. “Rabbi. I once prayed and prayed to G-d for something I really wanted but my prayers weren't answered.”

“Yes, they were.” said the Rabbi, “The answer was ‘No!’”

The greatest blessing you can have is to trust Hashem.

Because, even if you don't get what you prayed for, nevertheless you succeeded in gaining faith and trust in Hashem. And what blessing can be greater than that! But if you put your trust in Man, even if you get what you asked for, you've turned “your heart away from Hashem.” (17:5)

However, when someone puts his trust in Hashem, he wakes up in the morning and goes to sleep at night a happy man, confident that all is for the best. That's what you call security!



Insights into the Zemiros sung at the Shabbos table throughout the generations.

Baruch Hashem Yam Yam - ברוך ה' יום יום
“Blessed is Hashem Each Day...”

שהשלום שלך ... על ישראל שלום

“May the Merciful One bless Israel with peace, and may they merit to see children and grandchildren studying Torah and engaged in mitzvos, bring peace upon Israel.”

If three consecutive generations of a family are Torah scholars, say our Sages, there is a guarantee that succeeding generations of that family will be Torah scholars as well. This guarantee applies, however, only when these three generations of scholars see each other and thus absorb the influence of example and form an unbreakable chain of family tradition.

We therefore pray in this song that we may actually merit to see the next two generations involved in Torah study, for this will bring peace upon Israel by developing families with an unbroken Torah tradition.

Parshas Behar/Bechukosai

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