



# Parshas Behar

For the week ending 17 Iyar 5757  
24 May 1997

## Overview

**T**he Torah prohibits normal farming of the Land of Israel every seven years. This "Shabbos" for the land is called *shemita*. (5754 was a *shemita* year in Israel.) After every seventh *shemita*, 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 *shemita* 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.

## Insights

### A HAPPY LOT

#### "...on Mount Sinai..." (25.1)

The mitzva of *shemita* commands the Jewish People to stop working their fields every seventh year and promises that, miraculously, Hashem will provide for their needs.

However, the miracle of *shemita* varied according to their level of *bitachon* (trust in Hashem).

When the Jewish People had a high level of *bitachon*, the amount of food that was harvested in the sixth year was no different from any other year — however, it was able to nourish for three years instead of one.

When the level of the Jewish People's trust in Hashem was low, however, then the fields yielded, in actual terms, three times the amount of a normal year.

The first way was through a hidden miracle, the second through an open miracle. Why did the *lower* level of trust invoke the seemingly *greater*, open miracle?

An open miracle is always a 'second-best' in Hashem's plan. Man is the creature who is designed specifically to have freedom of choice. Open miracles are so compelling that they limit Man's freedom of choice.

Nevertheless, Hashem responds even to our lower level of trust in Him and provides the pyrotechnics of an open miracle; if that is what is needed to make the people feel secure.

Rav Chaim of Volozhin once asked the Vilna Gaon what the Talmud means when it says that one of Hashem's attributes is 'to be satisfied with His lot'. The Vilna Gaon replied that Hashem's lot is the Jewish People. He would like us to be on a higher level, but nevertheless He is content with us at whatever level He finds us.

### HIGHER THAN EVEREST

#### "And Hashem spoke to Moshe on Mount Sinai, saying..." (25:1)

Hashem told Moshe all of the *mitzvos* on Mount Sinai. Why is it, then, that the Torah specifically records that the mitzvah of *shemita* was told to Moshe 'on Mount Sinai'? Weren't the rest of the *mitzvos* also told to Moshe on Sinai?

One of the effects of the mitzva of *shemita* was to plant in the hearts of the Jewish People the idea that Hashem, for all His Transcendence, nevertheless supervises every last detail of this world.

*Shemita* teaches us that Hashem provides for our needs even though we are seemingly but a small dot in intergalactic space. In His eyes, all those billions of light years are no more than a blink.

It is not 'beneath His dignity,' as it were, to involve Himself with this lowly physical plane. For 'in the place of Hashem's greatness, there is His humility.'

Hashem chose as the place of His revelation, not Everest, not the highest mountain in the world, but rather the lowly Sinai. It was on Sinai that He chose to reveal to us His Torah. For all Hashem's ineffable Majesty and Transcendence, humility and lowliness of spirit are dear to Him.

That's the connection between *shemita* and Sinai: Just as *shemita* demonstrates that Hashem is involved with this the lowliest of worlds, so He revealed the Divine Presence to us on Sinai, the lowliest of mountains.

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# Pesach Sheini Special

## THE NELSON TOUCH

In 1801, Lord Horatio Nelson was engaging the Danish fleet in a desperate battle off Copenhagen. The English fleet was being badly mauled. Nelson's superior officer hoisted the signal to withdraw from action. On the bridge of Nelson's ship, the crew indicated to Nelson that the Admiral had ordered a retreat. Nelson promptly put a telescope to his blind eye and said, "I really do not see the signal." He then turned away and continued to engage the enemy, turning probable disaster into total triumph.

As every English schoolboy knows this is called "The Nelson Touch." Overriding orders and snatching victory from the jaws of defeat.

Nadav and Avihu were two of Aaron Hakohen's sons. They died when they brought a 'strange fire' as an offering in the Holy-of-Holies. They took the law into their own hands, acted independently and ignored the Halacha. Even though their motives may have been noble, they stepped outside the bounds of what the individual may do by himself, with dire consequences.

In Judaism, the end does not justify the means. We are judged not by results alone, but also by the method by which we achieve those results. There are no 'Nelsons' in Judaism.

But what possessed Nadav and Avihu to behave in such a fashion?

The *Arizal* says that Nadav and Avihu carried within them fragments of the soul of Adam, the first man.

Adam was alone in his world. Not only was he a man, he was *Man*. **He was both an individual and a category**, a species by himself. Therefore he was able to act independently of anyone else, because there **was** no one else. He was alone in his world.

Because Nadav and Avihu had in them the sparks of the soul of Adam, they too felt that they could act as 'Nelsons', devoid of their connection to the Jewish People.

## A SECOND CHANCE

On Wednesday of this week, exactly one month after Pesach, we will celebrate *Pesach Sheini*, the 'second Pesach.'

In the time of the *Beis Hamikdash*, anyone who was in a state of spiritual impurity due to contact with a corpse was disqualified from bringing the Pesach offering. However, they had a second chance to bring the offering one month later on the 14th of Iyar.

As the Torah says: **"We are contaminated through a corpse (lit. 'the soul of Adam'); why should we be diminished by not offering Hashem's offering at the appointed time..?"** (*Bamidbar 9:6*)

Interestingly, the people speaking in this verse were those who carried the corpses of Nadav and Avihu. That's what they meant when they said: **"We are contaminated by the soul of Adam,"** the soul of Adam in the body of Nadav and Avihu. They assumed that their impurity came not merely from contact with a corpse but from the taint of Nadav and Avihu's sin.

However, they protested against this exclusion: They surmised that, as Nadav and Avihu had acted altruistically, they had paid for their crime and their sin had been expunged. In other words, Nadav and Avihu had paid for their 'Nelson's Touch,' so why couldn't those who carried their bodies bring the Pesach offering?

In fact, they were wrong. Their contamination resulted merely from their contact with a corpse, not the taint of the 'The Nelson Touch.'

But why should a human corpse have such a power to defile?

Man is a Divine agglomeration of body and soul, of the elevated and the lowly. When the lofty soul separates from its mortal coil, a spiritual vacuum results, allowing a 'power of division' to rule in its place. This 'power of division' which separates the holy parts of a person also causes separation and division in Yisrael.

It was for this reason that they couldn't bring the Korban Pesach, not because of the 'Nelson Touch' of Nadav and Avihu.

# Haftorah: Yirmiyahu

## 32:6 - 27

The history of the People of Israel has not been terminated by conquest and exile. These are mere digressions, sub-plots in its mission. However removed we may seem from the center-stage of history, Hashem has promised us ultimate survival and success.

This theme is illustrated in this week's Haftorah: The *Parsha* speaks of the sale and redemption of land.

Similarly, in the Haftorah, Hashem commands the prophet Yirmiyahu, even while he is in prison, to redeem a family property.

Yirmiyahu knew that the whole of *Eretz Yisrael* was about to fall prey to the Babylonians. What possible need was there to redeem a property which was about to be captured?

Hashem told Yirmiyahu that however great the tragedy, however long the exile, eventually Hashem will redeem His People. The redemption of this property was not merely symbolic, for eventually the Jewish People would return to their land and dwell in it in peace.

Even in the face of disaster, we should conduct ourselves with the assurance that Hashem is running the world and make our preparations accordingly.

## RIGHT AND RAMIFICATIONS

**"Great of counsel and mighty of deed, Whose eyes are cognizant of all the way of humankind, to give each man according to his ways and the fruit of his deeds." (32:19)**

When someone is judged deserving of the death penalty in the Heavenly courts, Hashem throws into the balance the tremendous grief that his innocent parents, his wife and children will suffer if the sentence is executed.

Therefore, Hashem does not punish anyone until he also calculates whether this will cause undeserved punishment to one of his family members. That is the meaning of this verse: **"Great of counsel and mighty of deed..."** Only Hashem is capable of calculating the precise extent of a person's due, that he should only be called upon to bear **"according to his ways and the fruit of his deeds."**

Sources:

*A Happy Lot - Rabbi Zev Leff, Outlooks and Insights Higher Than Everest - Kometz Hamincha in Mayana shel Torah*

*The Nelson Touch - Shem MiShmuel Right and Ramifications - Rabbi Mahar" a Yitzchaki*

## Fatherly Advice - tidbits from the Ethics of the Fathers traditionally studied on summer Sabbaths

**"Never say 'I will study when I have free time' for that time may never come."**

*Rabbi Gamliel ben Rabbi Yehuda Hanassi (2:4)*

This is directed to every person who is so busy that he finds only a little time in the midst of his activities to study. Let him not say "What can I learn in such little time? When I have a serious amount of free time then I will do some serious studying." That time may never arrive, and in the meantime, through his neglect he has lost forever the quarter of an hour he had available, a part of his life which, after all, is nothing more than a chain of such fragments of time.

*Tiferes Yisrael*

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