

OHRNET

SHABBAT PARSHAT BEHAR • 17 IYAR 5784 MAY 25 2024 • VOL 31 NO. 28

PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

Crop Rotation

"For six years you may sow your field" (25:3)

I still remember learning at school about crop rotation. One year the field would be planted with wheat, the next year with barley or some other crop, and the third it would be left to lie fallow. And then the cycle would begin again.

When reading this week's Torah portion, one could think that the mitzvah of Shemita, the prohibition of working the fields in the seventh year, is some kind of "holy crop rotation." The difference being that in the Torah it says you should work the field for six years and leave it for a seventh.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

First, there is evidence that working a field for six straight years and then leaving it for one year does nothing to improve its yield and may even have a negative effect. Second, the Torah prescribes dire punishments for the non-observance of Shemita. The seventy years of the Babylonian exile were a punishment for seventy non-observed Shemita years during the 430 years that the Jewish People dwelled in the Land of Israel. We know that Hashem's punishment is always measure for measure. If Shemita was a matter of crop husbandry, how is exile an appropriate punishment? What does exile have to do with the cessation of agriculture in the seventh year? Furthermore, from an agricultural point of view, seventy years without husbandry can have had no possible benefit for the land. Seventy years of weeds and neglect in no way contribute to the land's rejuvenation, so how is this punishment an appropriate restitution?

To answer these questions, we must examine what causes a person to violate Shemita in the first place.

A great malaise of our own era is the compulsion to overwork. The workaholic defines himself by his job. When you meet someone socially, the question "What are you?" is usually answered by "I'm a doctor," or "I'm an accountant" or "I'm a rabbi."

There is a fundamental mistake here. What we do is not what we are.

In our society we have confused what we do with who we are. The underlying belief revealed here is that the more I work the more I become myself. Violation of the laws of Shemita comes from a belief that the more I work, the more money I will make, and the more I make, the more I am the master of my own world.

When a person is sent into exile, all the familiar comforting symbols of his success are taken away from him. He realizes that what he does is not who he is. Both his survival and his identity are gifts from Above. The insecurity of exile brings a person face to face with his total dependence on Hashem.

It is from the perspective of exile that a person can rebuild his worldview so that he can see that what he does is not who he is.

Q & A

BEHAR

Questions

1. Why does the Torah specify that the laws of shemita were taught on Har Sinai?
2. If one possesses shemita food after it is no longer available in the field, what must he do with it?
3. The Torah commands, "You shall sanctify the fiftieth year." How is this done?
4. Which two "returns" are announced by the shofar during yovel?
5. From where does the yovel year get its name?
6. What prohibitions are derived from the verse "v'lo tonu ish et amito" ~ a person shall not afflict his fellow?
7. What is the punishment for neglecting the laws of shemita?
8. If shemita is observed properly, how long is the crop of the sixth year guaranteed to last?
9. After selling an ancestral field, when can one redeem it?
10. Under what circumstance may one sell ancestral land?
11. If a home in a walled city is sold, when can it be redeemed?
12. What does the word "days" mean in this week's Parsha?
13. What is considered a walled city?
14. What is the definition of a "ger toshav"?
15. To what is one who leaves Eretz Yisrael compared?
16. Why does Rashi mention the plague of the firstborn in this week's Parsha?
17. List three prohibitions which demonstrate the dignity with which one must treat a Jewish indentured servant.
18. Who supports the family of the Jewish indentured servant during his years of servitude?
19. If a Jew is sold as a servant to a non-Jew, does he go free after six years?
20. Where is it permitted to prostrate oneself on a stone floor?

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary, unless otherwise stated.

Answers

1. 25:1 - To teach us that just as Shemitta was taught in detail on Har Sinai, so too, all the mitzvot were taught in detail on Har Sinai.
2. 25:7 - Remove it from his property and declare it ownerless.
3. 25:10 - At the beginning of the year the Beit Din declares, "This year is kadosh (sanctified)."
4. 25:10 - The return of the land to its original owner, and the "return" (freedom) of the slave from slavery.
5. 25:10 - From the sounding of the shofar. A ram's horn is called a yovel.
6. 25:17 - One may not intentionally hurt people's feelings, nor give bad advice while secretly intending to reap benefit.
7. 25:18 - Exile.
8. 25:21,22 - From Nissan of the sixth year until Sukkot of the ninth year.
9. 25:24 - After two years following the sale, until yovel. At the beginning of yovel it returns to the family automatically.
10. 25:25 - Only if one becomes impoverished.
11. 25:29 - Only within the first year after the sale. Afterwards, even in yovel, it does not return.
12. 25:29 - The days of an entire year.
13. 25:29 - A city that has been surrounded by a wall since the time of Yehoshua.
14. 25:35 - A non-Jew who lives in Eretz Yisrael and accepts upon himself not to worship idols.
15. 25:38 - To one who worships idols.
16. 25:38 - The prohibition against taking interest is accompanied by the phrase, "I am the L-rd your G-d who took you out of Egypt." Rashi explains that just as Hashem discerned in Egypt between those who were firstborn and those who were not, so too will Hashem discern and punish those who lend with interest, pretending they are acting on behalf of others.
17. 25:39-43 -
 1. Do not make him perform humiliating tasks.
 2. Do not sell him publicly.
 3. Do not make him perform unnecessary jobs.
18. 25:41 - His master.
19. 25:54 - No. If he is not redeemed with money, he must wait until the yovel to go free.
20. 26:1 - In the Mikdash.

COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

BIRKAT HAMAZON (PART 24)

BLUEPRINT OF JEWISH DESTINY

“Anyone who recites Birkat HaMazon is blessed through it.”
(Zohar HaKadosh to Parshat Terumah)

Birkat HaMazon concludes: “I was a youth and also have aged, and I have not seen a righteous person forsaken, with his children begging for bread. Hashem gives strength to His nation, Hashem blesses His nation with peace.”

The first sentence about “I was a youth” is taken from Tehillim (37:25). The Anaf Yosef writes that the verse is teaching us that even when the righteous see their children reduced to having to beg for bread, they do not consider themselves forsaken by Hashem. In their righteousness, they understand that whatever Hashem sends their way is only for their good.

Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch points out that the verse does not say that the righteous will not find themselves reduced to poverty. That is an untenable proposition because it equates poverty with wickedness, which is clearly not true. Rather, the verse is stating that even if righteous people find themselves completely destitute, they will never be forsaken. They will be supported by others who are in a better financial position than they. Because the essence of the Jewish nation is to help those in need.

In Frankfurt-am-Maine, they had very discreet and creative solution for those who were sitting Shivah but who couldn't really afford to. In every Shivah home, the communal tzedakah box – already partially filled – was put in a prominent place. If the person sitting Shivah was able to, they, and the people who came to the Shivah, would add more to the tzedakah box. If the family was needy, they were able to take out whatever they needed for the week of Shivah. The system was designed in such a sensitive way that no one ever knew who put money in the tzedakah box or who took out. It is truly a source of inspiration to realize just how careful the community was with the feelings of those in need. One of the most basic definitions of the Jewish nation is that we are merciful and compassionate, always ready to assist anyone who requires support.

Birkat HaMazon ends with the stirring words from Tehillim (29:11), “Hashem gives strength to His nation, Hashem blesses His nation with *shalom*.” It is fascinating to note that the word *shalom* brings to a close not just Birkat HaMazon. *Shalom* is so intrinsic to the Jewish nation that it is also the final word of the entire set of Mishna, as well as the last word of the final blessing in the Amidah and the last word in Birkat Kohanim.

The last tractate in the Mishna (Uktzin 3:12) concludes with a teaching in the name of Rabbi Shimon ben Chalafta, “The Holy One, Blessed is He, found no vessel to hold blessing for Israel other than peace, as it is stated (Tehillim 29:11), ‘Hashem gives strength to His nation, Hashem blesses His nation with peace.’” As Rabbi Yom Tov Lipmann Heller (1579-1654) writes so eloquently in his formative and indispensable commentary on the Mishna, Tosefot Yom Tov, it is an inescapable fact that no blessing in the world can be sustained in the absence of *shalom*.

Why is *shalom* so indispensable that its message repeats itself in so many fundamental dimensions of our relationship with Hashem? The Vilna Gaon offers a parable to explain. *Shalom* is like a barrel that is constructed with individual staves of wood that are pressed tightly together. The tighter they slot into each other, the less

chance there is that the contents will leak out. In the same way, says the Vina Gaon, if the Jewish nation draws together and we all learn how to coexist in a state of shalom, we will be able to hold all of the blessings that Hashem pours into us constantly, without losing even a “drop.”

The Chofetz Chaim (Ahavat Chesed 2:5) writes, “When we do chesed, it arouses Hashem’s chesed on His nation, even when they do not have Zechut Avot. We live at a time when strife and hardships prevail in the world. We don’t have any other counsel to be saved from the travails that come each day, other than to be occupied with chesed.”

The Chofetz Chaim wrote those words some 136 years ago. And they are equally applicable today – if not more so.

To be continued...

PARSHA OVERVIEW

The Torah prohibits normal farming of the Land of Israel every seven years. This “Shabbat for the land” is called “Shemitta.” After every seventh Shemitta, the fiftieth year, Yovel (“Jubilee”) is announced with the sound 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 Shemitta and Yovel years.

During 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 the first year after the sale. The Levites' cities belong to them forever. The Jewish People are forbidden to take advantage of one another by lending or borrowing with interest. Family members should redeem any relative who was sold as an indentured servant as a result of impoverishment.

subscribe @ ohr.edu

to receive Ohrnet directly to your email each week

TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Bava Metzia 82-88

Backing Up One's Words

Rabbi Elazar said, "This teaches that righteous people promise little and perform much; whereas the wicked promise much and do not perform even little."

This teaching on our *daf* appears to relate the same message as the statement by the Sage Shammai in Pirkei Avot (1:15): "Say little and do much." In fact, the Maharsha writes that Rabbi Elazar's statement is indeed the same one as that recorded in the name of Shammai in Pirkei Avot (although it may seem unusual for the Gemara to record the teaching of an Amora that seems to repeat the teaching of a Tana in a Mishna).

Rabbi Elazar explains that he learns this "tip" from Avraham Avinu. Avraham *said* to the three visitors who came to him after he circumcised himself, "And I will give you some bread to eat, and afterwards you shall continue on your way." (Gen. 18:5) However, the verses tell us what he actually *did*: "And he ran to the cattle, and he took a calf, tender and good... and he took cream and milk and the calf that he had prepared, and he placed it all before them..." (Gen. 18:7-8) Avraham also requested that bread be prepared for them quickly. (Gen. 18:6)

Why do righteous people promise little and perform much? The Maharsha offers a reason. Sometimes, if a host offers too much, the guest will not want to enter, or a recipient will not want to accept what is offered. This is because the guest will not want to cause excessive bother to the host, and also does not want to feel a need to stay longer than he wishes, due to gratitude for the excessive bother. Therefore, the host should offer only a minimal amount, but yet try to perform and give in the most generous way possible for him. The Maharsha states that Avraham was conveying to the guests that they were not a burden to him, nor would he impose upon them after they ate. He told them, "And I will give you some bread to eat, and *afterwards you shall continue on your way.*"

While the Maharsha does not explicitly explain the "flip-side" that Rabbi Elazar also teaches – "the wicked promise much and do not perform even little" – we should also be able to understand the reason for this from the reason provided by the Maharsha. A host who offers too much to a guest is, in a sense, offering nothing. It is a near certainty that the guest will refuse the offer, due to its being a great burden on the host, and also because the guest will feel overly beholden to the host. Therefore, the guest will end up refusing to accept the offer, and the wicked host is happily "off the hook."

▪ *Bava Metzia 87a*

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

Synonyms in the Hebrew Language

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

The Shiny Month

“It was in the second year in the second month, on the twentieth of the month, the cloud ascended from upon the Tabernacle of the Testimony” (Num. 10:11). On that very day of the year in the Jewish Calendar, my grandfather Dovid (Dezider) Messinger returned his soul to his Maker in the year 2009. He hailed from a small village in Slovakia called Horne Saliby, whence he lived before the Holocaust and to where he returned afterward. Later, he and his wife moved to Bratislava (Pressburg), where they raised four children; and after his wife’s death, he lived in Los Angeles and then in Williamsburg. In this essay dedicated to his memory, we discuss the two names for “the second month” in the Jewish Calendar – Ziv and Iyyar. That month is very special because the commandment of Counting the Omer runs through the entire month, marking it as the only month on the calendar that has a special commandment associated with the entire month.

As Ibn Ezra (to Deut. 16:1) famously writes, technically-speaking Hebrew does not have names for the months of the year (just like it does not have any names for the days of the week). Rather, in the Hebrew tradition, the months are numbered ordinally, starting with the first month marked by when the Jews exited Egypt (what we call Nissan) and continuing through until the twelfth month (what we call Adar). That said, if one looks carefully in the Bible, one will encounter names for the months. For example, in reporting about the construction of the First Holy Temple in Jerusalem during King Solomon’s reign, the Bible states: “And it was in the four-hundred and eightieth year to the Children of Israel’s exit from the Land of Egypt, in the fourth year – in the month of Ziv, which is the second month – to the reign of Solomon over Israel, and he [Solomon] built the house for Hashem” (I Kings 6:1), and later on again summarizes that “in the fourth year, the House of Hashem was established in the month of Ziv” (I Kings 6:37). In these two passages, the Bible gives us a name for the “second month” – Ziv.

Historians and Bible scholars tend to explain that Ziv is the Phoenician/Canaanite name for the second month, and the Hebrew Bible simply borrowed the Canaanite name for that month. Even without resorting to that sort of speculation, we can point out that besides the two instances in which the second month is referred to as Ziv, the word *ziv* appears six times in the Aramaic parts of the Bible in the sense of “radiance/shine/splendor” (Dan. 2:31, 4:33, 5:6, 5:9-10, 7:28).

The only difference is that the month-name Ziv is spelled defective (ZAYIN-VAV), while the Aramaic common word is consistently spelled plene (ZAYIN-YOD-VAV). Interestingly, Radak in his *Sefer HaShorashim* writes that the etymological root of the month-name Ziv is the trilateral root ZAYIN-YOD-VAV, even though the name is never spelled with a YOD in the Bible. On the other hand, Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim in *Cheshek Shlomo* traces the name Ziv to the biliteral root ZAYIN-VAV, which he also sees as the etymon of the word *zavit* (“corner”). In doing so, he explains that the second month is called Ziv because in it, the sun somehow turns a “corner” (perhaps by introducing the new season of spring?).

The Talmud (*Rosh HaShanah* 10b-11a) teaches that while everybody agrees that the Patriarch Isaac was born in the month of Nissan, there is a dispute between Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Yehoshua about whether the Patriarchs Abraham and Jacob were born in Nissan or Tishrei. In elaborating on the ramifications of that dispute, the Talmud explains that one difference is how to understand why the second month is called Ziv: According to

Rabbi Eliezer, who held that Abraham and Jacob were born in Tishrei, the second month is called Ziv in allusion to the “radiance/splendor” of trees that occurs in that spring month, as that is when the trees begin to blossom. Similarly, the Jerusalem Talmud (*Rosh HaShanah* 1:2) writes that the second month is called Ziv because that is when the flora and trees have budded and become recognizable.

According to Rabbi Yehoshua, who said that Abraham and Jacob were born in Nissan, the second month is called Ziv in allusion to the birth of the “radiant ones of the world” (*zivatnei olam*) – i.e., the three Jewish Patriarchs. This seemingly strained explanation seems to conflate Nissan with the month after it, because if the forefathers were all born in Nissan, why would that be a reason for the name given to the next month? Rashi touches on this question by explaining that by the time the second month “comes around,” the forefathers who had been born in the month before were already born. We will elaborate more on the connection between these first two months and how it relates to the Forefathers later on.

The more popular term for the second month is Iyyar, but that name never appears in the Bible. Rather, that name came to the Jewish calendar from the Babylonian calendar by prophetic revelation (see Jerusalem Talmud *Rosh HaShanah* 1:2 and pseudo-Rashi to *Bereishit Rabbah* §48:9). In fact, the names of all the months in the Jewish Calendar used nowadays were borrowed from the names of the months on the Babylonian calendar. Hence, scholars trace the Hebrew month-name Iyyar to the Akkadian month-name *ayyaru*, which means “light” (and anyway seems awfully similar to the Hebrew word *ohr*, which also means “light”).

Because the name Iyyar does not appear in the Bible, there is no official way of knowing how to spell the name. At bar in this question is whether the name Iyyar ought to be spelled with two *yods* (ALEPH-YOD-YOD-REISH) or with one *yod* (ALEPH-YOD-REISH). The month-name Iyyar does appear in the Mishnah (*Rosh HaShanah* 1:3), but its spelling is still subject to dispute: The famous Kaufmann Manuscript of the Mishnah (which dates back to late 11th century Italy and is the oldest vowelized MS of the Mishnah) and the Parma Manuscript spell the name Iyyar with two *yods*, but in many other popular editions of the Mishnah (including *Ein Yaakov* to *Rosh Hashanah* 18a), the month’s name is spelled with only one *yod*.

Rabbi Yakov Moelin (1365-1427) in responsa *Maharil* (§189), Rabbi Yisroel Isserlin (1390-1460) in *Terumat HaDeshen* (§233), Rabbi Yaakov Margolis of Regensburg (1430-1501) in *Seder HaGet* (§17, §19), the *Shulchan Aruch* (*Even HaEzer* §126:23), and Rema (*Even HaEzer* §126:7) all conclude write that when writing a *gett*, one should optimally spell the month Iyyar with two *yods* – even though they acknowledge that some sages would spell the name of the month with one *yod*. Rabbi Shmuel ben David Halevi (1625-1681) in *Nachalat Shivah* likewise concludes that Iyyar ought to be spelled with two *yods*, noting that he found in the *Yalkut Chadash* (s.v. *avot v'imahot* in the name of *Megaleh Amukot* §121) that the name Iyyar can be read as an acronym for the names of the Jewish foreparents – Avraham, Yitzchak, Yaakov and Rachel – who are said to be the “Chariot of Hashem.” This allusion is also cited by *Beit Shmuel* (*Even HaEzer* §126:20).

Rabbi Shmuel HaLevi also notes that when the Torah stipulates the rules of Pesach Sheini to be performed in the “second month” (Num. 9:11), Targum pseudo-Jonathan explicitly writes that this refers to the month of Iyyar, which he spells with two *yods*. Interestingly, Rabbi Moelin adduces the opposite proof from Targum attributed to Jonathan, noting that because Targum spells it with one *yod*, it should be spelled with one *yod* (in our versions of Targum pseudo-Jonathan, the name Iyyar is always spelled with two *yods*, per Rabbi Margolis). Rema (*Even HaEzer* §126:7) writes that because of this orthographical question, many rabbinic courts have a tradition to refrain from issuing *gittin* during the month of Iyyar, thus avoiding the question entirely (see *Aruch HaShulchan Even HaEzer* §126:15).

Rabbi Eliezer Hagar of Vizhnitz (*Damesek Eliezer* to Lev. 9:22) connects the deficient spelling of Iyyar to the second blessing of the tripartite Priestly Blessings, as that blessing begins with the word *ya'er* (Num. 6:25), which is a perfect anagram of the name Iyar spelled with one *yod*. Perhaps this relates to what we cited above from the Zohar about this month being the source of all radiance in the world.

An anonymous sage who studied under Rabbi Meir of Rothenberg (1215–1293) wrote a work published by Rabbi Y. Y. Stahl as *Sefer HaKushyot*. In that work, he writes that the month name Iyyar is related to the Rabbinic Hebrew word *avir* (“air”) in allusion to the pleasant spring weather common in that month, whereby the air is neither too hot nor too cold. (See Rabbi Yosef Kara to I Kgs. 8:2 and Maharal’s *Chiddushei Aggadot to Yevamot* 62b who likewise connect the name Ziv to the enjoyable Goldilocks weather typical of that month.) Needless to say, the Rabbinic Hebrew *avir* is actually borrowed from the Greek word *aer*, which is also the etymon of the English word *air*.

Alternatively, the anonymous author of *Sefer HaKushyot* explains the name Iyyar based on the Talmudic tradition (*Shabbat* 88a) that after Hashem created the world, its continuation was held in abeyance until the Jews would later accept the Torah in the month of Sivan. That abeyance or suspension can be characterized as though the world is “hanging in the air,” hence the name of the month that precedes Sivan is related to the word for “air.”

Rabbi Moshe Shapiro (1935–2017) expounds on the significance of the name Ziv: When the Bible describes the “rays of glory” emanating from Moses’ face (Ex. 34:29), Targum Onkelos uses the Aramaic word *ziv* to denote that radiance. Similarly, when Isaiah speaks of Hashem’s honor filling the entirety of creation (Isa. 6:3), Targum Jonathan (there) employs the term *ziv* to signify the “radiance” of His honor. Thus, *ziv* denotes the spread or radial emanation of something – such as light or honor – rather than the thing itself.

The Talmud (*Rosh HaShanah* 31a) mentions that the song sung by the Levites in the Temple during the Mussaf offering on Shabbat was the Song of Haazinu (Deut. 32:1–43). The song was serialized into multiple parts, each of which was sung on a sequential week. The mnemonic for remembering how it is broken up is *haziv lach* (literally, “the splendor for You”), which is comprised of the first letter of the initial verses of each section. Maharsha (to *Rosh HaShanah* there) explains that this song alludes to its author Moses. Singing this song on Shabbat, the day of the week on which Moses died, is a declaration of Moses’ radiance, i.e., the glowing after-effects of his teachings, which endure in the world despite him passing away long ago.

In the Jewish calendar, the month of Iyyar follows Nissan, which is associated with “miracles” (*nissim*). It thus represents the residual effects of the month before it, in the same way that radiance of light signify the light’s effects without talking about the source of light itself. Although the Forefathers – the “shiny ones” – were technically born in Nissan (the thing itself), Iyyar represents the continuation of the light that they brought into the world in the previous month (their “radiance” or “shininess”). Likewise, the forefathers of the Jewish people themselves are called the “Chariot of Hashem” in the sense that they are not Him, but are rather vehicles for the spread of His will to the world at large. In other words, they help His will radiate and reverberate throughout creation.

Because of Iyyar’s role as the continuation and legacy of Nissan, if one did not bring the Paschal Sacrifice in Nissan, one may still bring it in Iyyar, because Iyyar reflects part of the light of Nissan and is, after a fashion,

considered a continuation of it. Likewise, the fruits and buds of a tree/plant alluded to in the name Ziv are the splendor that radiate from the core trunk, even if they do not refer to the tree trunk itself.

There is another fascinating take on the meaning of Iyyar and the significance of that particular month. The great Kabbalist Rabbi Shimshon of Ostropoli (d. 1648) connects the name Iyyar to the verse “Let my enemies be shamed and utterly confused, they will regret and be shamed in but a moment” (Ps. 6:11), as the first letters of the final four words of that verse spell out the name Iyyar (with two *yods*). As confirmed by the Base HaSefer website (developed by Moshe Escott of Taryag Analytics), this is the only verse in the entire Bible whose words form an acronym that spells out Iyyar.

Rabbi Moshe Sofer (*Chatam Sofer* to *Shabbat* 147b) similarly connects the name Iyyar to the verse “I will not place all the maladies of Egypt upon you, for I am Hashem your Healer” (Ex. 15:26), as the first letters of the final three words of that verse spell out Iyyar (with one *yod*). Rabbi Mordechai Nachman Aronovsky explains that taken together, this means that the month of Iyyar represents the notion that Hashem will destroy the Jews’ enemies on their behalf, while saving the Jews from a similar fate (he also references *Seder Olam Rabbah* ch. 5, which states that the war against Amalek occurred in the month of Iyyar).

Rabbi Aronovsky adds, in the name of Rabbi Dovid Jungreis (1897–1971), another illuminating insight: the first letters of the final eight words of Ps. 6:11 spells out the phrase “*yom KAF Iyyar*,” which refers to the twentieth day of the month of Iyyar. That was the very day that the Jews started traveling away from Mount Sinai after receiving the Torah (Num 10:11). In light of the above, it is no wonder that the Bible relates that when the camp began to travel, Moses would pray, “Arise O Hashem, and Your enemies will be scattered and Your haters will flee from before You” (Num. 10:35) as that too refers to the downfall enemies, which is appropriate for the month in question.

TAAMEI HAMITZVOS

Reasons behind the Mitzvos

by Rabbi Shmuel Kraines

“Study improves the quality of the act and completes it, and a mitzvah is more beautiful when it emerges from someone who understands its significance.” (Meiri, Bava Kama 17a)

Yovel and the Redemption of Land

Mitzvos #331; #339-341

When the Jewish people live in Eretz Yisrael, each tribe in its portion, there is a mitzvah to observe every fiftieth year as Yovel (*Sifra, Behar* 1). One of the mitzvos associated with Yovel is that all fields in Eretz Yisrael return to their original owners in Yovel, and it is prohibited to sell a field permanently even to a fellow Jew. There is an additional law that allows a seller to “redeem” his field by repurchasing it from the buying after two years have passed. In the fiftieth year, a shofar is blown to prompt everyone to return whatever fields they purchased. Since it is hard for people to give up their property, it is necessary for the shofar blast to penetrate their hearts and prompt an instant and simultaneous collective relinquishment (*Sefer HaChinuch*).

Hashem explains: “The land may not be sold permanently because the land is Mine, and you are sojourners and tenants by Me” (*Vayikra* 25:23). In other words, Hashem wishes us to remember that our land is actually His and our residence there is dependent on His continued desire to allow us to stay, which is dependent on our worthiness. Our inability to purchase fields permanently reminds us of this fact and strengthens our resolve to be loyal servants of Hashem. An added benefit of this mitzvah is that it discourages theft and envy of property because people realize that whatever belongs to others is Divinely ordained (*Sefer HaChinuch*).

Yovel also serves to balance the financial standing of society. When people go through financial strain and are forced to sell their ancestral heritage, their loss becomes permanent, and on the opposite side of the scale, the wealthy amass property excessively. Hashem granted us financial security by limiting our ability to sell fields (*Moreh Nevuchim* Vol. 3 §39).

When a person sells a house, the Torah gives him the right to repurchase it even immediately. However, if the house is in a walled city, once a year passes from the time of the sale it becomes the permanent possession of the buyer, and it does not return in Yovel. If it is in an unwalled city, it may also be redeemed immediately, like a house in a walled city; however, it returns in Yovel, like a field.

The commentators explain that Hashem gives a seller the right to repurchase his house because it is difficult for a person to have to sell his house and it is shameful if circumstances force him to do so. Once a year has passed, during which the seller managed to live elsewhere, he no longer has the right to repurchase it. The year limit also encourages him to repurchase it. The Torah does not command the return of properties in Yovel except regarding fields because livelihood depends on them. Houses outside walled cities are generally built for farmers and watchmen. Since they are necessary for the upkeep of fields, they too return in Yovel (*Ramban*).

Another reason why the Torah allowed the permanent sale of houses in walled cities is to encourage the development of property, as people do not want to develop property that they own only temporarily. With regard to a field, on the other hand, it is common practice for a field owner to hire sharecroppers for short periods, and long-term consecutive ownership does not benefit the field's administration. Thus, the Torah applies the mitzvah to return fields during Yovel specifically to fields (*Chizkuni*).

Ohrnet Magazine is a weekly Torah magazine published by Ohr Somayach Institutions,
POB 18103, Jerusalem 91180, Israel · Tel +972-2-581-0315 · Email. info@ohr.edu

Contributing authors, editors and production team: Rabbi Nota Schiller – Rosh HaYeshiva,
Rabbi Yitzchak Breitowitz - Rav of Kehillos Ohr Somayach, Avi Kaufman, Rabbi Reuven Chaim
Klein, Rabbi Reuven Lauffer, Rabbi Yaakov Meyers, Mrs. Rosalie Moriah, Rabbi Moshe
Newman, Rabbi Shlomo Simon, Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair, Rabbi Yehuda Spitz,
Mrs. Helena Stern.

©1992-2023 Ohr Somayach Institutions – All rights reserved – This publication contains words of
Torah. Please treat it with due respect. Editor's disclaimer – Ohrnet Magazine is not intended to
be a source for halachic rulings. In any real and specific case one should consult a qualified
halachic authority for ruling.