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SHABBAT PARSHAT BEHAR-BECHUKOTAI · 22 IYAR 5766 · MAY 20, 2006 · VOL. 13 NO. 31

PARSHA INSIGHTS

THE FREEDOM OF SLAVERY

“For the children of Yisrael are servants to Me, they are My servants, whom I have taken out of the land of Egypt...” (25:55)

Few words have as bad a reputation as slavery. Slavery conjures up backbreaking labor, injustice, misery and a whole lexicon of negative images.

The Negro spirituals that grew from the Black experience of slavery in America based themselves on the story of the Exodus: “Go down, Moses, way down to Egypt land, tell old Pharaoh, to let My people go.” The prototype of all slavery is the enslavement of Egypt; the archetype of all freedom from slavery is the Exodus.

“Let my people go!” was the Torah phrase used by Civil Rights leaders in the sixties; it was also used by the campaign to free Russian Jewry.

What is often forgotten about the quote “Let my people go!” is that the Torah didn’t say that exactly. The Torah adds a few more highly important words, “...and they will serve Me.” The freedom of the Exodus is predicated on the Jewish People becoming G-d’s servants.

If ‘slavery’ has highly negative connotations, ‘servitude’ is scarcely an improvement. Servitude sounds suspiciously like slavery. By leaving the slavery of Egypt to become the

servants of G-d, did we then jump out of the frying pan into the fire?

The essence of slavery is not misery and oppression; it isn’t “All my trials, L-rd, soon be over.” The essence of slavery is that a slave is not free to express his own identity; he can only express the identity of his master. A slave is someone who is estranged from himself. A slave has no opportunity to express his essence, who he is. All he can do is to express his master’s will.

The freedom of the Exodus is predicated on the Jewish People becoming G-d’s servants.

So now it all depends: if Pharaoh is your master, then your life is to express Pharaoh’s will. If G-d is your Master, then your life is to express G-d’s Will.

When we say in the Shema “Hashem Echad”, “G-d is One”, we do not mean that there is only one G-d — we mean that there is no other existence except for G-d.

Thus, nothing in the creation can have an independent purpose apart from expressing what G-d wants, for if it existed to express itself, that would mean that something could exist that was not part of G-d, that it existed *in spite* of G-d, as it

were. By definition, this is impossible.

The Jewish People were chosen to teach the world that our entire existence is to express G-d’s Will, for in that seeming slavery is the ultimate freedom — the freedom of living a real existence.

• Based on the Maharal’s Drasha for Shabbat HaGadol’

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PARSHA OVERVIEW

BEHAR

The Torah prohibits normal farming of the Land of Israel every seven years. This “Shabbat” for the land is called “*shemita*”. The year 5768 will be a *shemita* year in Israel. After every seventh *shemita*, 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. G-d promises to provide a bumper crop prior to the *shemita* 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.

BECHUKOTAI

The Torah promises prosperity for the Jewish People if they follow G-d’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 the Jewish People to repent, will be in seven stages, each more severe than the last. *Sefer Vayikra*, the book of Leviticus, concludes with the details of *erachin* – the process by which someone vows to give the *Beit Hamikdash* the equivalent monetary value of a person, an animal or property.

ISRAEL Forever

SEVEN STEPS TO DISASTER

“If one fails to study Torah this leads to neglect of observing its commandments. This is followed by disgust for those who are observant and then by a hatred of Torah scholars. The inevitable results are preventing others from observance, denying the validity of the commandments and totally abandoning the faith...”

These “seven steps to disaster”, which Rashi quotes from our Talmudic Sages, are based on passages in *Parshat Bechukotai* which will be read this Shabbat in synagogues throughout Israel and the world.

When we reflect on the polarization that exists in Israel between the religious and secular communities, we see how the above-mentioned seven steps explain the root of the problem.

One of the big challenges facing the new government is how to deal with education in Israel, both in the religious and secular schools. It is to be hoped that an initiative will be taken to eliminate the ignorance of Torah, which is the first of the seven steps, and thus secure Israel forever.

LOVE OF THE LAND - THE SAGES

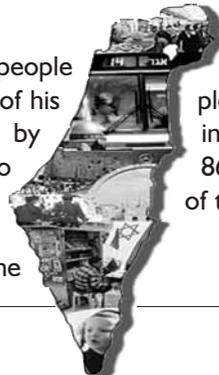
Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael

“IF THERE IS NO LEARNING OF TORAH THERE CAN BE NO PROPER DEALING WITH PEOPLE. IF THERE IS NO PROPER DEALING WITH PEOPLE THERE CAN BE NO LEARNING OF TORAH” — RABBI ELAZAR BEN AZARYAH (AVOT 3:17)

If one fails to learn Torah his dealings with people will not be proper, for he will not be aware of his responsibilities. It has been pointed out by Chazal (*Bava Kama* 30a) that one who wishes to be a truly righteous person must study the Tractates of *Seder Nezikin*, which deal with man’s responsibility to his fellow man. If, on the

other hand, one does not deal properly with people, his Torah will be forgotten as a penalty for causing the *Chillul Hashem*, described by Chazal (*Yoma* 86), of people saying, “How corrupt are the actions of this person who learns Torah.”

• *Tosefot Yom Tov*



BEHAR

1. If one possesses *shemita* food after it is no longer available in the field, what must he do with it?
2. From where does the *yovel* year get its name?
3. What prohibitions are derived from the verse “*v’lo tonu ish et amito* — a person shall not afflict his fellow”?
4. If a home in a walled city is sold, when can it be redeemed?
5. What does the word “days” mean in this week’s Parsha?
6. What is considered a walled city?
7. To what is one who leaves *Eretz Yisrael* compared?
8. Why does Rashi mention the plague of the firstborn in this week’s Parsha?
9. List three prohibitions which demonstrate the dignity with which one must treat a Jewish indentured servant.
10. Where is it permitted to prostrate oneself on a stone floor?

BECHUKOTAI

1. To what do the words “*bechukotai telechu*” refer?
2. When is rain “in its season”?
3. What is meant by “you shall eat your bread to satisfaction”?
4. What is meant by “and a sword will not pass through your land?”
5. Which progression of seven transgressions are taught in Chapter 26, and why in that particular order?
6. What is one benefit which the Jewish People derive from the Land of Israel’s state of ruin?
7. What positive element is implied by the words “and I will bring them into the land of their enemies”?
8. In verse 26:42, why is the word “remember” not used in connection with the name of Yitzchak?
9. What happens when a poor person dedicates the value of a person to the Beit Hamikdash and doesn’t have sufficient funds to fulfill his vow?
10. Where must “*ma’aser sheini*” be eaten?

Answers to this Week’s Questions!

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

BEHAR

1. 25:7 - Remove it from his property and declare it ownerless.
2. 25:10 - From the sounding of the shofar. A ram’s horn is called a *yovel*.
3. 25:17 - One may not intentionally hurt people’s feelings, nor give bad advice while secretly intending to reap benefit.
4. 25:29 - Only within the first year after the sale.
5. 25:29 - The days of an entire year.
6. 25:29 - A city surrounded by a wall since the time of Yehoshua.
7. 25:38 - To one who worships idols.
8. 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 G-d discerned in Egypt between those who were first-born and those who were not, so too will G-d discern and punish those who lend with interest, pretending they are acting on behalf of others.
9. 25:39-43 - a) Do not make him perform humiliating tasks; b) Do not sell him publicly; c) Do not make him perform unnecessary jobs.
10. 26:1 - In the Mikdash.

BECHUKOTAI

1. 26:3 - Laboring in the study of Torah.

2. 26:4 - At times when people are not outside (e.g., Shabbat nights).
3. 26:5 - You will only require a little bread to be completely satisfied.
4. 26:6 - No foreign army will travel through your land even on their way to a different country.
5. 26:14,15 - Not studying Torah, not observing mitzvot, rejecting those who observe mitzvot, hating Sages, preventing others from observing mitzvot, denying that G-d gave the mitzvot, denying the existence of G-d. They are listed in this order because each transgression leads to the next.
6. 26:32 - No enemy nation will be able to settle in the Land of Israel.
7. 26:41 - G-d Himself, so to speak, will bring them into their enemies’ land. This means that even when the Jews are in exile, G-d will supply them with leaders who inspire them to keep the Torah. This guards the Jews from assimilating into the host culture.
8. 26:42 - Because the image of Yitzchak’s ashes (Yitzchak was prepared to be brought as an offering) upon the altar is always before G-d.
9. 27:8 - The person whose value was donated goes before the *kohen*, who sets the obligation according to the poor person’s ability to pay.
10. 27:30 - In Jerusalem.

- When the *machatzit hashekel* collection began and why
- Jewish giving for right cause and wrong one
- The three different *terumot* of money
- When there is a second month of Adar
- The marking of graves or sites of human remains
- Enforcing the law against *kilayim* (mixed plants) offenders
- Who is obligated to give *machatzit hashekel* and from whom is it and other gifts to the *Beit Hamikdash* accepted
- Who must add a *kalbon* (small coin) to *machatzit hashekel* and why
- If heirs are considered a single unit in regard to obligation of *kalbon* and the tithing of animals
- Transporting *machatzit hashekel* money to the *Beit Hamikdash* and what happens if it is lost or stolen
- If one uses for his own obligation coin given to him to relay for *machatzit hashekel*
- When one gives more than a *machatzit hashekel*
- History of *machatzit hashekel* sums and reasons for them
- Money left over from sum dedicated to *machatzit hashekel* or sacrifices
- Money left over from collections for captive redemption, for relief of poor or for their burial
- The significance of quoting words of Torah in name of source
- When the tithing of *machatzit hashekel* and of animals was done
- Removing crates on Shabbat and drinking wine at Pesach Seder

ABOVE SUSPICION

When Moshe granted the tribes of Reuven and Gad their request to receive their portion of Eretz Yisrael on the east side of the Jordan, he made it conditional on their first taking part in the wars waged by the other tribes for the conquest of the rest of the Land. By fulfilling this condition they would not only be doing what was right in the eyes of G-d who wanted them to participate in this conquest, but would also erase any suspicion that the other tribes might have that they wished to settle in the already-conquered territory in order to avoid taking part in the war of the entire nation. The need to achieve both of these objectives was summed up in the words “Then you will be free of guilt before G-d and Israel.” (*Bamidbar* 32:22)

In the same spirit our *mishna* informs us of the caution exercised by the *kohanim* who went into the office where the *machatzit hashekel* coins were stored three times a year to tithe the money needed for the purchase of communal sacrifices. They were careful not to wear anything that could possibly be used for concealing stolen coins, even *tefillin* or shoes! Should anyone of them fail to thus avoid suspicion the result would be that if he subsequently came upon hard times people would say it was a punishment for his dishonesty, and if he became prosperous they would say it was the result of his pilfering.

This teaches us, concludes the *mishnah*, that a man must strive to be considered righteous in the eyes of man just as in the eyes of G-d.

WHAT THE Sages SAY

“The righteous require no monuments; their words are their memorials.”

- *Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel Shekalim 7a*

SABOTAGED SABBATH

From: Laura

Dear Rabbi,
How do we know that the Sabbath is in fact on Saturday and not on Sunday or Friday as observed by Christianity or Islam?

Dear Laura,

Interestingly, the Talmud (Sanhedrin 65b) raises your question. The distinguished military leader Turnus Rufus asked Rabbi Akiva what makes the Sabbath special? Rabbi Akiva replied, what makes you special? He answered, the king desired to elevate me above all others. Rabbi Akiva said, so too G-d elevated the Sabbath above all others. Turnus Rufus challenged, who said today is the Sabbath? Rabbi Akiva replied, the River Sabatyon [which miraculously rests on the Sabbath, see *The Lost Jews*, which appeared in **Ohrnet Magazine** for July 24, 2004] is proof, Ov [a form of sorcery which doesn't work on the Sabbath] is proof and your father's grave that doesn't raise smoke [since the wicked are given respite] on the Sabbath is proof.

The seven-day week has always been the standard method of counting the weeks, and the seventh day of the week has always been observed by Jews as the Sabbath: "Work shall be done on six days [corresponding to the days of Creation], and on the seventh day you shall rest." In Hebrew, the weekdays are named 'day one' through 'day six', and the Sabbath is called Shabbat, the day of rest. Even the religions you mention agree about which day is the Sabbath: Latin-based languages refer to the day with some variation of Sabbath, and in Arabic the weekdays are named by number as in Hebrew, while Saturday is called 'yaum as-

Sabt'. If so, why don't those religions observe Shabbat as their day of rest?

Shabbat is Divinely ordained for the Jews alone. The verse states, "And the Children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath as an eternal covenant between Me and [them]" (Ex. 31:16). Our Sages taught, Shabbat complained before the Holy One, Every day of the week has a mate: day one has two, three has four, and five has six. Who shall be my mate? G-d replied, The Jewish people are also alone among the nations. Israel shall be your mate! Similarly, the Shabbat prayer proclaims, "You did not give it to the nations of the lands...but to Israel Your people have You given it in Love, to the seed of Jacob, whom You have chosen". Therefore, despite the fact that these religions were inspired to the idea of Sabbath through Judaism, by Divine intervention their observance was deflected away from Shabbat.

Our sources note that according to ancient Astrology (which Judaism recognizes, see *The Zodiac* in **Ohrnet Magazine**, Nov. 26, 2005), Saturn's influence over Saturday dictates that the day should be one of sorrow and pain. For this reason, the early Christians, who were knowledgeable astrologers (note that the Latin names of the days of the week correspond to the names of the luminaries which accordingly govern the beginning of each day), fixed Saturday as a day of solemn fasting and self-affliction. Perhaps under this pretense they were divinely deflected away from Shabbat (Rabbi Yonaton Eibeshitz, *Ya'arot Dvash* 2:3).

However, the Jews are not bound by astrological influences (Shabbat 156). For this reason G-d commanded to observe Shabbat not only by resting and refraining from work, but also by actively proclaiming and sanctifying it through *kiddush*, meals, singing and learning. In this way G-d reveals the unique, eternal and unchanging relationship between "Me and the Children of Israel" (Rabbi Bachaye).

WHAT'S THE RIGHT THING TO DO?

REAL-LIFE QUESTIONS OF SOCIAL AND BUSINESS ETHICS

STUCK ON THE BUS

Question: While riding in a city bus one day I had the unpleasant experience of an immodestly dressed lady taking a seat next to me, something which strongly offended my religious sensitivities concerning physical contact between men and women. What was the right thing for me to do?

Answer: This is the same situation that once faced the Torah giant of the last generation, Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, *zatzal*. He rapidly made the calculation that if he would take another seat or even remain standing for the rest of the ride, this would severely offend the lady, who would realize that

she was the cause of his discomfort. Although he was still a long way from his destination, Rav Auerbach rang the bell and got off the bus at the very next stop and waited for the next bus.

This should serve as a lesson in refraining from passing judgment on others. The lady in the case mentioned, as well as the one in your experience, were probably not even aware of your sensitivities and had no intention of discomforting you. They are the victims of a permissive culture and contact with them must be avoided in the most considerate way to avoid insulting them.

REWARD FOR PATIENCE

Taking care of his mentally unstable grandmother in the geriatric ward of the hospital was a very taxing task for the young man. Although she was unreasonably demanding and sometimes violently so, he managed to maintain his composure and to treat her with the greatest respect.

One day, while he was visiting her, she could not find her false teeth. She shouted at him, accusing him of stealing her teeth. When he tried to explain that he was innocent, she gave him such a resounding slap in the face that

he felt as though he was about to lose his own teeth. He nevertheless suffered in silence and helped her locate the lost teeth.

A patient in a nearby bed was so impressed with the behavior of this young man that she decided to suggest him as a matrimonial prospect for a relative, a girl from one of the most respected families in Israel.

The shidduch worked out and on the first day of their marriage the young couple went to visit the grandmother whose patience-inducing slap brought them together.

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