

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS ZT"l**

### Covenant & Conversation

**O**ne of the most striking features of the Torah is its emphasis on love of, and vigilance toward, the ger, the stranger: Do not oppress a stranger; you yourselves know how it feels to be strangers, because you were strangers in Egypt. (Ex. 23:9)

For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the stranger?residing among you, giving them food and clothing. You are to love those who are strangers, for you yourselves were strangers in Egypt. (Deut 10:17-19)

The Sages went so far as to say that the Torah commands us in only one place to love our neighbour but thirty-six times to love the stranger (Baba Metsia 59b).

What is the definition of a stranger? Clearly the reference is to one who is not Jewish by birth. It could mean one of the original inhabitants of the land of Canaan. It could mean one of the "mixed multitude" who left Egypt with the Israelites. It might mean a foreigner who has entered the land seeking safety or a livelihood.

Whatever the case, immense significance is attached to the way the Israelites treat the stranger. This was what they were meant to have learned from their own experience of exile and suffering in Egypt. They were strangers. They were oppressed. Therefore they knew "how it feels to be a stranger." They were not to inflict on others what was once inflicted on them.

The Sages held that the word ger might mean one of two things. One was a ger tzedek, a convert to Judaism who had accepted all its commands and obligations. The other was the ger toshav, the "resident alien", who had not adopted the religion of Israel but who lived in the land of Israel. Behar spells out the rights of such a person. Specifically: If any of your fellow Israelites become poor and are unable to support themselves among you, help them as you would a resident alien, so they can continue to live among you. (Lev. 25:35)

There is, in other words, an obligation to support and sustain a resident alien. Not only does he or she have the right to live in the Holy Land, but they have the right to share in its welfare provisions. Recall that this is a very ancient law indeed, long before the Sages formulated such principles as "the ways of peace",

obligating Jews to extend charity and care to non-Jews as well as Jews.

What then was a ger toshav? There are three views in the Talmud. According to Rabbi Meir it was anyone who took it upon himself not to worship idols. According to the Sages, it was anyone who committed himself to keeping the seven Noahide commandments. A third view, more stringent, held that it was someone who had undertaken to keep all the commands of the Torah except one, the prohibition of meat not ritually slaughtered (Avodah Zarah 64b). The law follows the Sages. A ger toshav is thus a non-Jew living in Israel who accepts the Noahide laws binding on everyone.

Ger toshav legislation is thus one of the earliest extant forms of minority rights. According to the Rambam there is an obligation on Jews in Israel to establish courts of law for resident aliens to allow them to settle their own disputes – or disputes they have with Jews – according to the provisions of Noahide law. The Rambam adds: "One should act towards resident aliens with the same respect and loving kindness as one would to a fellow Jew" (Hilkhos Melachim 10:12).

The difference between this and later "ways of peace" legislation is that the ways of peace apply to non-Jews without regard to their beliefs or religious practice. They date from a time when Jews were a minority in a predominantly non-Jewish, non-monotheistic environment. "Ways of peace" are essentially pragmatic rules of what today we would call good community relations and active citizenship in a multi-ethnic and multicultural society. Ger toshav legislation cuts deeper. It is based not on pragmatism but religious principle. According to the Torah you don't have to be Jewish in a Jewish society and Jewish land to have many of the rights of citizenship. You simply have to be moral.

One biblical vignette portrays this with enormous power. King David has fallen in love and had an adulterous relationship with Batsheva, wife of a ger toshav, Uriah the Hittite. She becomes pregnant. Uriah meanwhile has been away from home as a soldier in Israel's army. David, afraid that Uriah will come home, see that his wife is pregnant, realise that she has committed adultery, and come to discover that the king is the guilty party, has Uriah brought home. His pretext is that he wants to know how the battle is going. He then tells Uriah to go home and sleep with his wife before returning, so that he will later assume that he himself is the father of the child. The plan fails. This is what

happens: When Uriah came to him, David asked him how Joab was, how the soldiers were and how the war was going. Then David said to Uriah, "Go down to your house and wash your feet." So Uriah left the palace, and a gift from the king was sent after him. But Uriah slept at the entrance to the palace with all his master's servants and did not go down to his house.

David was told, "Uriah did not go home." So he asked Uriah, "Haven't you just come from a military campaign? Why didn't you go home?"

Uriah said to David, "The Ark and Israel and Judah are staying in tents, and my commander Joab and my lord's men are camped in the open country. How could I go to my house to eat and drink and make love to my wife? As surely as you live, I will not do such a thing!" (2 Samuel 11:6-11)

Uriah's utter loyalty to the Jewish people, despite the fact that he is not himself Jewish, is contrasted with King David, who has stayed in Jerusalem, not been with the army, and instead had a relationship with another man's wife. The fact that Tanakh can tell such a story in which a resident alien is the moral hero, and David, Israel's greatest king, the wrongdoer, tells us much about the morality of Judaism.

Minority rights are the best test of a free and just society. Since the days of Moses they have been central to the vision of the kind of society God wants us to create in the land of Israel. How vital, therefore, that we take them seriously today. *Covenant and Conversation is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl zt"l* ©2024 The Rabbi Sacks Legacy Trust [rabbisacks.org](http://rabbisacks.org)

### RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

## Torah Lights

**“G**od spoke to Moses at Mount Sinai, telling him to speak to the Israelites and say to them:

When you come to the land that I am giving you, the land must be given a rest period, a sabbath to God. For six years you shall plant your fields, prune your vineyards, and harvest your crops, but the seventh year is a sabbath of sabbaths for the land..." (Leviticus 25:1-5) The Torah portion of Behar opens with the fundamental laws of Shmitah, the manifestation of God's total involvement in the land. During these days when the issue of land is the ultimate question on everyone's mind – for what is the issue of peace and war if not land – we have to remind ourselves how it was possible that despite almost two thousand years of exile, the Jews never stopped dreaming of their return to the Land of Israel – and have indeed returned in our generation. Was it something miraculous and mystical that sustained this relationship of a people to land for so long? And if it was, wherein lies the origin of this unique relationship?

Ordinarily, Jewish law divides along two lines: requirements between human beings and God, and requirements between one human being and another.

But there is also a third realm: the requirements of a Jew toward his/her land. In fact, the very climax of the book of Leviticus emphasizes precisely this third realm, *bein yehudi l'artzo*, between the Jew and his land, replete with laws of the tithing of produce, the necessity of allowing the land to lie fallow during the Sabbatical year, and returning all property to its original owner in the jubilee year.

But in order to grasp the full symbolism of a Jew's relationship to a land, and how this land is at the crux of our experience as Jews, we must take note of a much earlier biblical incident at the very dawn of our history, when our first patriarch purchased a plot for his wife's gravesite, paying an astonishingly high sum for a relatively tiny piece of land.

Abraham's purchase of this property not only provides us with biblical evidence that our deed to Hebron reaches back to our earliest beginnings; it unites our history with a specific parcel of earth, inextricably linking the founders of our faith-nation with the land of Israel in an eternal bond, within the boundaries of God's initial covenant with Abraham.

This purchase of land indelibly establishes for us the commitment which the Bible expects a husband and wife to have for each other, a commitment which extends beyond physical life and translates into a significant monetary expenditure. The sages of the Talmud derive our form of religio-legal obligatory engagement, *kiddushin* (with a ring or an object of material value), from Abraham's purchase of the plot of land that would serve as Sarah's cemetery plot (*Kiddushin* 2a). The Talmud deduces the "taking" of marriage from the "taking" of the land. Thus, *halakha* creates a metaphoric parallel between marriage, land and eternity, alluding to the unique and magnificent ideal that we must develop an eternal relationship of love and commitment to our land paralleling the eternal relationship of love and commitment to our spouse.

In order to understand what it means to be "engaged or married" to the land, let's first isolate three elements of marriage, and then trace these elements back to our portion of Behar. First of all, marriage contains the physical or sexual component, called "entrance" (*biah* in Hebrew), which expresses the exclusivity of the love relationship. Second, there are the fundamental obligations the couple has to one another, specifically outlined in the Bible (Ex. 21:10) and clearly delineated in the fifth chapter of the tractate *Ketubot*. Third, the Torah essentially sees marriage as an eternal relationship. Abraham's obligations to Sarah continue even beyond her lifetime, as we have seen, and the prophet Hosea describes God's engagement to Israel: "I shall consecrate you unto Me forever" (Hosea 2:21). Although divorce is an allowable option if there is no better solution, the rabbinic view at the conclusion of the Tractate *Gittin* remains operative: "Even the altar of the holy Temple weeps when a husband and wife are

divorced" (Gittin 90b).

Undoubtedly, the ideal is the eternal relationship, and even when psychologies collide, biology heals: For the birth of a child, and the eternal potential of this new creature continuing after the death of each spouse, soon asserts the true continuity of the marital relationship.

We find that these three elements relate to the land of Israel as well! "When you come into the land," utilizes the the verb whose very root refers to sexual relations specific to husband and wife (biyah). And when we're told to hallow the fiftieth year (Lev. 25:10), the word the Torah employs is 'kiddashtem' – the same term which is the rabbinic expression for marriage. The Torah parchment unfurled in Behar seems to weave a mystical marital canopy uniting the nation Israel with the land of Israel.

Second, no sooner have we entered the land than the Torah instructs us concerning our obligation to that land (much like the obligations a husband has to a wife): for six years we are obligated to plant the fields, prune the vineyards, and harvest the crops, "but the seventh year is a sabbath of sabbaths for the land...you may not plant your fields, nor prune your vineyards...since it is a year of rest for the land" (Lev. 25:4-5). The land must lie fallow every seventh year when its produce belongs to the poor who eat freely from the crops. And, in a veritably uncanny, human fashion, resembling the husband-wife relationship, the land responds to our actions, or our lack thereof. If we maintain our obligation to the land, the land will respond to us with abundant produce. If not, the land will grow desolate, for "as long as the land is desolate it will enjoy the sabbatical rest that you would not give it when you lived there" (Lev. 26:35). In other words, the land will lie fallow and unproductive.

Hence, a relationship of mutuality exists between Israel and its land.

Third, just as there is an eternal aspect to marriage, there is also an eternal aspect to the land. During the jubilee, the fiftieth year, the Torah commands that land one was forced to sell returns to the original owners (Lev. 25:13). This is called redemption of property (geulat karka). Land remains in the family for perpetuity even when dire circumstances force a sale. The eternal link between the land and its owners is the issue addressed in the haftara of Behar when Jeremiah, the prophet of the destruction of the holy Temple, redeems his uncle Hananel's land for him. Despite the destruction at hand, Jeremiah knows that eventually the Jews will return to the land. God's promise of an eternal covenant is paralleled in the eternal rights of a family toward its property.

Throughout the world, people love the land in which they are born, a love so central that one's homeland is called in most vernaculars "motherland" or "fatherland." These terms are absent in the Hebrew

language; our relationship to the land is not one of son or daughter to father or mother, but is rather akin to that of husband to wife or wife to husband.

May we be worthy of the land and may the land properly respond to our love and commitment to it in this generation of return and redemption. *The above article appears in Rabbi Riskin's book Bereishit: Confronting Life, Love and Family, part of his Torah Lights series of commentaries on the weekly parsha, published by Maggid. ©2024 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

### RABBI BEREL WEIN

## Wein Online

The parsha begins with the word that defines its name – b'har – on the mountain. The mountain naturally is Sinai and the Torah's emphasis is to reinforce Judaism's core belief that our Torah is God-given and not the work of a committee over centuries. This basic belief lies at the heart of many of the contentious disputes that have marked Jewish life over the ages.

While original splinter groups, such as the Saducees and the Karaites, did not openly deny the validity of the Written Torah as being godly in origin, they strenuously denied the holiness of the Oral Law of Sinai and denigrated its rabbinic interpretations and decrees. This led to serious splits within the Jewish people and to bitter recriminations that lasted centuries. In all these instances, the divinity of Torah and of its Oral Law always eventually won out. Deviant movements eventually fell away from the main body of the Jewish people, both individually and as a potent group in influencing Jewish life and mores.

The "mountain" referred to is the one at Sinai where the Torah was given to Israel. It is a difficult mountain to ascend, The Psalmist asks: "Who can ascend the mountain of God?" But as difficult as it is to ascend the mountain, it is even more difficult to remain there. The Psalmist again intones "who can maintain oneself, in the holiness of God's place?" The struggle about maintaining the Jewish people on the mountain of God in belief and faith has been the hallmark of Jewish life over millennia. It has not abated in our time.

Jewish secularism comes in two different and divergent forms. One is simply that the Torah's way of life and value system does not harmonize with modern society and its demands. Shabat, kashrut, etc. are all too restrictive to be functional in today's world. The Jewish people cannot afford to be so different from the rest of the world. The mountain may have had its purpose at one time, but that time has now passed. New ideologies and circumstances have rendered it obsolete. So, for them the mountain no longer exists.

A second group denies the existence of the mountain altogether. There never was a mountain – it is all an urban legend fostered by the rabbis over the ages. In effect, our grandfathers were all liars or naïve

believers in legends and stories for which there is no current historical scientific evidence. Aside from these two groupings there are groups who wish to be included in the religion of Judaism and who do not see themselves as being secular. But, in varying degrees, they follow the ideas of the Saducees and the Karaites though they essentially also deny that the mountain has anything to do with God and divine origins.

History shows that in the long run such philosophies and movements give way to the pressures of time and circumstance and eventually lose their influence and power. At the end of the day, only the mountain remains as it always has, challenging us to ascend it and maintain ourselves upon it. ©2024 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](http://www.rabbiwein.com). For more information on these and other products visit [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com)

#### **RABBI AVI WEISS**

### **Shabbat Forshpeis**

**F**oundational to Jewish living is being attentive to the needy, as the Torah states, "If your brother is waxen poor, and his means fails with you: then you shall uphold him" (Leviticus 25:35). The phrase "you shall uphold him" is generally understood as preventative. In the words of Rashi, based on the Midrash, "Do not let him sink so that it will be hard for him to recover, but strengthen him the moment his hand fails. To what may this be compared? To the burden on a donkey's back. While it is still on the donkey, one person can seize it and set it straight. But once it has fallen to the ground, five people cannot lift it up" (Torat Kohanim).

Indeed, according to Maimonides, "You shall uphold him" is the source of the highest of the eight levels of charity. He writes, "The greatest level, higher than all the rest, is to fortify a fellow Jew and give him a gift or loan, form with him a partnership, or find him work until he is strong enough so that he does not need to ask others [for sustenance]" (Gifts to the Poor 10:7).

The preventative approach can be expanded to relate to other aspects of life. Eat well and exercise to prevent a heart attack, which could involve dangerous, life-threatening surgery. Invest prudently to prevent bankruptcy, from which there may be no path to recovery. Solve small disagreements with one's spouse, children, siblings, parents, and extended family rather than letting them fester and forever rupture the relationship.

As rational as this advice may be, it is sometimes not that simple. Sometimes a person needs to hit rock bottom before seeking help. Sometimes salvation only comes when all seems lost.

Perhaps these models coexist: the latter focuses on the person in need. For that individual, maybe complete failure is the necessary prerequisite to begin anew. The former, however, relates to the person

providing assistance. His or her obligation is to step in and "uphold him" – immediately, much before the fall.

Even if the receiver rejects help and needs to hit bottom before turning matters around, "you shall uphold him" still applies, mandating that we all be sensitively present while never overbearing, aiding the beleaguered to slowly stand and climb back up. ©2024 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

#### **ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT**

### **Disposing of Shemitah Produce**

*Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss*

**O**n Lag BaOmer of a *Shemitah* year, at some point between the customary bonfire and the haircuts, some knowledgeable people will get up and declare ownerless the *etrog* jelly that they made after Sukkot. A short while later, they will reclaim their food. Before Shavuot, they will declare ownerless the olives they picked, and then reclaim them. Earlier, before Pesach, they will do the same thing with the wine that was produced through *Otzar Beit Din*. The pattern is repeated through *Shemitah* with many types of fruit.

These actions are indirectly derived from the verse, "And your cattle and the [wild] beasts in your land may eat all its yield" (*Vayikra* 25:7). Why is it necessary to specify "the cattle" (i.e., domesticated animals), when the verse also mentions "the beasts in your land"? For if a wild beast may eat of the *Shemitah* produce, a domesticated animal certainly may!

Our Sages use this verse as grounds for the following exposition: "Once the fruits have disappeared from the field and are unavailable for wild beasts, the fruits must disappear from the home as well and be unavailable for domestic animals." In other words, once there are no more fruits on the tree because they have all either fallen off or rotted, people may no longer hold onto them at home either. Rather, they must dispose of them. This disposal is called *biur*.

It would seem that this *biur* should be similar to *biur chametz*, which involves burning the forbidden food. Indeed, there are some who require this (Rambam, for example). However, the generally accepted practice is to remove the fruit from the home and declare them ownerless. After this has been done, it is permissible for the former owner to reclaim them. In theory, of course, someone else could come along in the meantime and acquire the food that had been declared ownerless. Nevertheless, it is rare to find people trying to find a bargain this way. This is likely because those who declare the items ownerless can do so in front of three good friends, and rely on their not taking advantage of the opportunity to acquire the items for themselves.

The times mentioned above for declaring certain produce ownerless (before Pesach, on Lag BaOmer, and before Shavuot) were designated by the Sages, based on their estimates when each type was no longer available in the fields for the wild beasts. They designated other times for other fruits. Today, various organizations (such as Machon HaTorah VeHa'aretz) produce *Shemita* calendars which detail the specific dates relevant to many different fruits and vegetables.  
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### RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

## Migdal Ohr

**"**And Hashem spoke to Moshe on Mount Sinai, saying. (Vayikra 25:1) Parshas Behar begins with the laws of Shmita, the Sabbatical year when the land of Israel is not worked. The introductory posuk of the parsha tells us it was said at Har Sinai. We don't find this by other mitzvos. You might ask, "What does one have to do with the other?"

If you did, you'd be in good company, as Rashi asks, "What is the connection of Shmita to Sinai?" He explains that just as all the laws of Shmita, from general to specific, were said at Sinai, so were the minute details of all mitzvos Divinely ordained and given to Moshe there.

But why Shmita? Why choose this one from amongst all the mitzvos? The Torah could have said that Hashem spoke to Moshe at Har Sinai saying to wear Tefillin or lend money without interest. Why, specifically, was Shmita chosen?

One approach is to understand what Shmita is and what it isn't. Leaving the land alone; letting it rest once in seven years, may sound like good advice. It gives the land the opportunity to regain nutrients. But if that were it, there are better ways to care for the land. Planting other crops can be beneficial, for example.

The fact is, Shmita isn't about protecting the land. It's about protecting our relationship with Hashem, and therefore, our right to live in the land. By giving up our hold on the land once in seven years, we're recognizing that our sustenance comes not from our efforts, but from Hashem's beneficent hand. During this free time, we are to study more Torah, work on our prayer, and recognize the true source of everything in our lives.

Part of the covenant at Sinai was that we would live and act as Hashem tells us to. Forgiving loans and allowing others access to our property shows we realize the world is His, not ours, and must be used as He directs. However, it's not just the world. Eretz Yisrael is a more spiritual land than any other and it reacts to our behavior.

If we don't remain holy and pure, and engage in improper relationships, the land will "vomit" us out. Shmita reinforces that if we wish to dwell in Eretz Yisrael, we must act like B'nai Yisrael. And that means being

different than the nations of the world.

The Gemara in Shabbos (89a) tells us the source of Antisemitism. The world doesn't hate the Jews because of anything we do, and there is no rational argument we can give them which will make them hate us less. So what is the source of this hatred? Har Sinai.

Har Sinai is called thus because it brought about "sinah," hatred of the gentiles for us. Rashi there explains it's because THEY didn't accept the Torah there, and we did. They are jealous of the ability we have to rise above the physical world and cleave to Hashem. Shmita and its miracles are proof that we can, to some degree, live on a higher plane.

THAT is what Shmita has to do with Har Sinai, and we should all look for opportunities to remind ourselves just how special we are.

*A young man approached his Rosh Yeshiva. It had been several years since he'd married and moved away and he was excited to visit. "How is everything?" inquired the Dean.*

*"Baruch Hashem, my job is good and my home is comfortable. But one thing bothers me. I don't feel the "kedusha," the spirituality, in my neighborhood, that I'd hoped for. It's not like Yeshiva and I think people could be more spiritually sensitive." He assumed the sage would tell him to find a new place to live. He was not ready for what his rebbi DID tell him:*

*"So, YOU add kedusha to your neighborhood." - It was up to him. Why hadn't he thought of that? © 2024 Rabbi J. Gewirtz & Migdal Ohr*

### RABBI DAVID LEVIN

## Sale and Redemption of Houses

**W**e have seen in past years that the laws of Yovel, the fiftieth year, affect the sale of all ancestral land. Ancestral land was not "sold" but "leased" for the amount of time left in the current fifty-year cycle. Should the original "family" manage to raise the funds to redeem the land at any point in the remaining fifty years, the "family" was encouraged to redeem the field as soon as the funds were available. The Rabbis explain that this land was a gift to that family from Hashem, and only someone who was desperate would sell his ancestral land on the condition that he redeem it, if at all possible, prior to the fiftieth year. Even if he could not redeem the land, the land would be returned to him on the Jubilee year, Yovel.

A different set of laws applied to a house. The Torah states, "If a man shall sell a residence house in a walled city, its redemption can take place until the end of the year of its sale; its period of redemption shall be a year. But if it is not redeemed until its full year has elapsed, then the home that is in a city that has a wall shall pass in perpetuity to the one who purchased it, for his generations; it shall not go out in the Jubilee year.

But homes in the open towns, which have no surrounding wall, shall be considered like the land's open field; it shall go out in the Jubilee year. As for the cities of the Leviim, the homes in the cities of their ancestral heritage, the Leviim shall have an eternal right of redemption. And what one will buy from the Leviim – a home that has been sold or the city of ancestral heritage – shall go out in the Jubilee year; for the homes of the Levite cities, that is their ancestral heritage among the B'nei Yisrael. But the fields of the open lands of their cities may not be sold; for it is an eternal heritage for them."

We see from this paragraph that there are several categories of houses being discussed: (1) a house in a walled city from the time of Yehoshua bin Nun, at the beginning of the conquest of the land, (2) a house in a non-walled city, (3) the cities of the Leviim, and (4) the fields surrounding the Levite cities, which could not be sold. Each of these categories must be understood for its own significance as well as its relationship to the other categories. In general, our Rabbis connect this paragraph with the laws of shemittah, leaving the land fallow in the seventh year. HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin explains that one who does not observe this law and works his field in the seventh year will be forced later to sell his dwelling. This is based on the concept of "mitzvah goreret mitzvah, v'aveira goreret aveira, observing a commandment brings about observing other commandments, but breaking a law of the Torah causes one to break other laws of the Torah." Thus, one who ignores shemittah may be forced to sell his ancestral home, an action which the Ramban considers to be a great embarrassment as well as a sin.

HaRav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch explains that the laws governing a house are different than those of a field. A field can only be redeemed after at least two years to allow the new owner to gain some advantage of his purchase. The house, however, must be redeemed within one year of purchase or it is lost. Hirsch also points out that the Torah does not say "a house of a walled city" or a "house in a walled city," but instead says "a house that is part of a settlement in a walled city." He learns from this that the wall had to be built first, and then the houses of the inhabitants built. These cities depended on farms of others to supply their food. This should then be contrasted with the towns in the open fields. These were houses surrounded by fields that were all self-sufficient in support of the families who lived in them. That contrast affected the law of return at the time of the Jubilee year. The open cities were much more attached to the land, so the land reverted to them at the fiftieth year, much as ancestral land which was tied to a family's inheritance by Hashem.

The houses and fields belonging to the Leviim were different than any of the houses or fields mentioned earlier in the paragraph. There were forty-eight cities that were the possession of the Leviim, and these were

spread throughout the lands belonging to the other tribes. Those cities became the ancestral heritage of the Leviim, since they did not have a specific section of Israel which they would inherit. A house within the Levite cities would, in some ways, be the possession of the entire city, and could be redeemed by the city if not the individual who dwelled there. The Levite houses could be redeemed at any time, whether sold to a non-Levite or to a different Levite. The Ramban explains that the Levite may redeem his house both immediately and forever, namely any time before the Jubilee year, unlike the one year given to other houses. The city also maintained semi-ownership of a house even if it was inherited by a non-Levite from a Levite (i.e., through a daughter who had married a non-Levite). The fields of the Leviim could not be sold as they were the special inheritance of the Leviim.

Returning to the beginning of our paragraph, HaRav Sorotzkin asks why the Torah does not use the same words which are repeated in two paragraphs before this one and another paragraph after this one. Each of those paragraphs was begun with the phrase, "V'chi yamuch achicha, and when your brother becomes destitute." The question is also asked why this paragraph begins with the case of a house in a walled city from Yehoshua's time, which was not a common occurrence, instead of a house in an open city, which was significantly more common. HaRav Sorotzkin explains that the whole concept of a walled city from the time of Yehoshua was an action taken by Hashem to designate Holiness in that place. Were it not for Hashem's decree, there would not be any special Holiness there. The same is true for all of the land of Israel. Hashem decreed that the land was Holy, and that is what enabled the Holiness of the seventh year's effect on the land. As we saw earlier, the owner of the house was forced to sell it because he became impoverished due to his lack of observance of the shemittah year. It was not becoming impoverished that caused him to sell his house in a walled city that Hashem designated as Holy, it was his desire to be free of the yoke of Holiness that then disqualified his ownership of a house in a designated Holy place.

We are unfortunate today that the laws of ancestral ownership and of Yovel do not apply without the Temple and without the majority of Jews living in the Land of Israel. But the yoke of Holiness still applies to each of us in many ways. The Land of Israel must be as precious to us as if each measure of land is our ancestral heritage. The land is not ours to sell or give away for any reason. It is Hashem's gift to the Jewish People. May we always treasure that gift. ©2024 Rabbi D. Levin

**RABBI PINCHAS WINSTON**

## Perceptions

**T**his is a small parsha with big messages. The central theme is summed up by this verse: "I am God your

God Who took you out of the land of Egypt, to give you the land of Canaan, to be God to you." (Vayikra 25:38) which the Gemora explains as follows: "All those who dwell in Eretz Yisroel are like those who have a God, and all those who dwell outside the land are like those without a God." (Kesuvos 110b)

This is why Shmittah and Yovel only apply in Eretz Yisroel, as well as all the laws of tithing produce. We do all of this to facilitate a relationship with God you just can't have outside of Eretz Yisroel, especially if there is no reason to be there.

You can certainly learn Torah and do mitzvos in the Diaspora, and get rewarded in the World to Come for them. But the doing of them will not enhance one's relationship with God the same way they do in Eretz Yisroel. This is why Ya'akov Avinu could not wait to get home after 20 years of being away from it.

What is the basis of the difference between Eretz Yisroel and the rest of the lands? Is it just because God says so, or because it is so?

The physical world takes up space, which is why two physical things cannot be in the same place at the same time without damaging one another. It is even harder to be in two places at one time, and for something to be physically higher, it has to be on a higher physical level.

Not so in the spiritual world. The spiritual world is neither bound by time nor space, therefore something can be on the same physical level, even lower, than other things and yet be much spiritually higher. Obviously when the Gemora says that Eretz Yisroel is the highest land it is not talking physically. It can only be talking spiritually.

Why does that make such a big difference? Because the higher something is on the spiritual ladder, the closer it is to God. This means that it can receive a higher, less filtered level of Divine light, which makes the reality of God far more real. The sense of Shechinah that a person has, goes from being only an idea to a palpable reality and awesome experience.

But more importantly, it means that their keli, the "body" that receives the light is more spiritually refined and therefore more capable of receiving higher levels of Divine light. This in turn further refines the body and spiritually strengthens it, making it even more capable of even higher levels of Divine light. This elevates Torah learning to a higher level, and mitzvah performance to a higher standard. Thus it says: "There is no Torah like the Torah of Eretz Yisroel, and no wisdom like the wisdom of Eretz Yisroel." (Bereishis Rabbah 16:4)

"[Even] the air of Eretz Yisroel makes a person wise." (Bava Basra 158b)

This is not talking about physical air you breathe through your physical nose. This is talking about a spiritual breathing your soul does by living in the only land whose borders parallel the only opening to Heaven. This results in a spiritual advantage that the Gemora

sums up with: "Three inherit the World-to-Come: One who lives in Eretz Yisroel, etc...." (Pesachim 113a)

"Living in Eretz Yisroel is the equivalent of performing all the mitzvos of the Torah." (Sifri, Re'eh; Tosefta, Avodah Zarah 5:2)

Here's the best part. All of this works regardless of who is in political control of the country. It's the reality of Eretz Yisroel during times of redemption and exile, if a person is here to take advantage of it (Tuv HaAretz). The midrash has only praise of Jews who make aliyah before Moshiach comes, because it shows that they put spiritual priorities over material ones.

People have many "reasons" for why they won't even entertain the possibility of moving from the Diaspora to Eretz Yisroel. The spies did too in Moshe Rabbeinu's time, and look how that worked out for them. You can fool people a lot of the time, and yourself, some of the time. But you can't fool God any of the time, so...

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### RABBI YISSOCHER FRAND

## RavFrand

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**P**arshas Behar is one of several places in Chumash where the Torah teaches the prohibition against taking interest (ribis): "Do not take from him interest and increase; and you shall fear your G-d -- and let your brother live with you." (Vayikra 25:36) There is a mitzvah to lend people money, however, the money must be lent without interest. Transgressing this prohibition results in serious punishment. "Rav Shimon (bar Yochai) says: Those who lend with interest lose more than they gain." (Bava Metziah 75b).

What is Rav Shimon talking about? If he were talking about punishment or about loss of reward in the world to come, then the same comment can be made about any mitzvas lo saaseh: Don't eat chazir! Ay -- it is geshmak! It doesn't matter -- more than you enjoy it, you will suffer for that enjoyment in the World to Come.

What then is so special about the ribis prohibition that prompts Rav Shimon to say "More than you profit, you will lose?"

There is a beautiful Kli Yakar in this week's parsha that gives an interesting explanation as to why the Torah prohibits ribis. The Kli Yakar defines the reason for this mitzvah as causing man to lose faith in the Master of the Universe. How does taking interest diminish a person's bitachon in the Ribono shel Olam?

The Kil Yakar explains that in virtually every business venture, a person can either make money or lose money. People who are in a business where they do not receive a set salary, rather they work on commission, see this all the time. Likewise, this is true of people who invest money. The investment can go through the roof and become a phenomenal success. However, sometimes a product is a hot item but then a



competitor comes out with something that is a little hotter. Everyone runs to the competitor and the first person loses his pants. Every person in business realizes that they need *siyata d'Shmaya* (Divine help) to succeed. Inevitably, they need to turn to the *Ribono shel Olam* to pray for their success in business, and this increases their *emunah* and *bitachon*.

This is not true, says the *Kli Yakar*, of those who lend out money with interest. Given, of course, that the loan is secure, it is money in the bank. If the debtor cannot pay, the lender will collect from the guarantor of the loan or he will foreclose a mortgage or take collateral. He has a high degree of security that he is in a "Win-Win Operation." Lending is a great business -- like money in the bank!

As a result of this surefire way to make profit, a person may lose his *bitachon*. "I have been doing this business for the last who knows how many years. What can go wrong?" A person becomes distanced from the whole concept that the *Ribono shel Olam* runs the world. He thinks that he is running the show and forgets that He is running the show. If a person loses *bitachon* and thinks that the *Ribono shel Olam* doesn't run the world, when he hits a crisis, he has no peace of mind.

The *Chovos haLevovos* notes that one of the tremendous attributes of a person who is a true believer (as opposed to someone who just pays "lip service" to the concept of *emunah*) is that he has a psychological safety net when unpleasant things in life hit him. "I know the *Ribono shel Olam* is with me; I know that He has been watching over me; I may not know why He is doing this to me, but I know that the *Ribono shel Olam* is in charge and He knows what He is doing and I have full faith in Him."

This has a tremendous calming effect on a person. There is a certain serenity that accompanies people who truly possess the attribute of *emunah* and *bitachon*. They lead serene lives knowing that the Master of the Universe is fully in charge. This is what *Rav Shimon bar Yochai* meant when he said, "More than they gain, they lose." Yes, they are making a profit and yes, the profit is in the bank. But they become less *baalei bitachon*. As a result, they may live troubled, worried, anxiety-filled lives. It is not worth it.

I recently heard a story involving a *Rav Dovid Bleicher*, who had been the *Rosh Yeshiva* in the



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*Novardok Yeshiva* during the war. As was typical in the *Yeshivas* in Europe, finances were very tight. He raised money and finally obtained food for the *talmidim*. A bit later, *Pesach* was approaching and there was no *matzah*. Where would he get flour for *matzah*?

After much effort, he was somehow able to procure

enough flour to supply the whole *Yeshiva* for the entire week of *Pesach*. He put that precious flour upstairs in the attic of the *Yeshiva*. That night there was a terrible wind storm and part of the roof blew off. It rained onto the flour and the flour became *chametz*. "The City of *Shushan* was bewildered." (*Esther* 3:15) What is going to be?

*Rav Dovid Bleicher* brought in the entire *Yeshiva* and told them: I want to ask you four questions:

"Who commanded us to eat *matzah* on *Pesach*?"

"Who helped me obtain the flour for the *matzah*?"

"Who brought the storm that caused the rain to leak through the roof?"

"Who caused the flour to leaven after it became wet from the rain water?"

To each question the students answered unambiguously "The *Ribono shel Olam*." *Rav Bleicher* concluded, "So everything happened because of Him and He knows that we need flour for *matzah* on *Pesach*. Undoubtedly he will provide us with other flour." In other words, if *Hashem* is running the world and He is calling the shots, then if He wants us to eat *matzah* on *Pesach*, He will get us more flour.

The night of *Bedikas Chometz*, the mail arrived with a tremendous check. The *Rosh Yeshiva* was able to buy more flour for *Pesach* and they all had *matzah*. This is the serenity of a person who is a *baal bitachon*.

Last Sunday, the *Ner Israel Kollel* had their Chinese Auction fundraiser. The day before yesterday, when I was walking out of the office, I saw a *kollel* youngster carrying a box with five *Playmobil* sets. If you have children, you know that *Playmobil* is a very popular toy (like *Tinker Toys* or *Lincoln Logs* in our days).

I asked him "Did you win that at the *Kollel* auction?" He said, "Yes, and not only that, but I won a prize at *Rabbi Berger's shul's* auction for the past three or four years." I inquired of him, "What is the trick?" He told me "It is because I have been working of my *midas habitachon* for the last four years and therefore when my wife left for the auction, I told her, "You are going to win tonight!"

Now, does that mean that someone who has *midas habitachon* will always win auctions? No. Does it mean that if someone has *midas habitachon*, everything in his life is going to turn out perfect? No. But, this person had a certain confidence and serenity because of his *midas habitachon*. It is an amazing phenomenon that this happened. Again, it does not follow that someone can say "Okay, I am going to work on my *midas bitachon* and then I am going to win the *Power Ball*." It does not work like that.

However, this *kollel* youngster made such a profound impression on me. "I worked on *midas habitachon*. I knew that I needed a *Playmobil* for my kids and I was confident that it would happen." The upshot is not "Have *bitachon* and you will win the lottery." The upshot is "Have *bitachon* and you will have a more calm and serene life." © 2024 *Rabbi Y. Frand and torah.org*