



Ashreinu | אשרינו

ENHANCING YOUR STUDY OF THE WEEKLY TORAH PORTION

GROWTH VERSUS MOVEMENT

RABBI RAEI BLUMENTHAL

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After introducing the concept of Shmita, the Torah institutes the idea of a national reset button: The Yovel Year. This unique mitzvah, which occurs every 50

years, is an essential

opportunity for the entire nation to be reshuffled. This manifests in a number of ways.

Firstly, slaves are freed. (Note the progressiveness of the Torah's view of slavery: It cannot be eternal. Human beings, by definition must be allowed to live with freedom.) Most significantly, the knowledge of Yovel ensures that no person can ever give up hope of redemption. It's a powerful testament to the virtues of self determination.

But beyond this, every piece of land is returned to its original owners. Practically, every fifty years, tribes are resettled in their ancestral homelands. Meaning, that families, tribes and communities may wander, move, purchase other plots and invest in new properties, but eventually must return to their places of origin.

The Meshech Chochma explains that this is a greatest bracha of Yovel - when people return home to live together, it engenders a closer family unit. No matter how far we drift from our families, Yovel ensures that we stay in touch. But the knowledge that this will happen creates a radically different culture and community.

To illustrate: A few years ago, on a summer trip to Israel, I was privileged to lead a group of students on a famous and beautiful hike; Nachal Yehudia. It is both gorgeous and challenging; a grueling seven hour hike. We began at one edge of the mountain, and worked our way down, enjoying the unique flora and fauna of the Golan Heights.

As we finished the tiyul, and arrived back at the bus, one student turned to me in disbelief - "This is exactly where we started!" He cried, "We just did one huge circle!" He was dismayed at the "pointlessness" of the morning, clearly, and comically, missing the point of a hike.

We, as human beings, understand that there is a purpose to life and work towards achieving such a goal. But all too often, we seem to confuse movement with growth and purpose. The feeling of change, movement and freshness on a superficial level mimics the feelings of internal growth and development. And we allow ourselves to be deluded by it. Anyone who has ever changed houses, classes, communities, social circles, or gyms and expected things to be different, only to find that they fall into the same rut again, recognizes the illusion that movement provides.

I heard recently one of the most successful plastic surgeons in LA now feels obligated to tell patients, that they should be aware that the surgery will not save their marriage. Movement and change does not equal growth.

So if we are to be stripped of our real estate investments, personal status, debtors and creditors, where are we growing? Effectively, the Torah challenges us: Imagine that in the end, it's not about our house, car or career. Imagine for a second that all of our material efforts are for temporary gains. Imagine that we'll only ever get what is always ours anyway. Imagine that in fifty years time we will be in exactly the same place as we are now economically and financially.

What would we like to do with your life? Are we growing for real, or simply moving around?

THE IMPACT OF CHESED

JORDAN LANDES ('18)

ON THE YOM KIPPUR OF THE 50TH YEAR OF THE Shemitah cycle, the shofar was blown, inducing the beginning of Yovel. With the start of Yovel, all Jewish servants were freed and all ancestral plots of land were returned to their original owners.

Why was Yom Kippur in particular chosen as the day to mark the start of Yovel?

Rabbi David Feinstein in his book, Kol Dodi offers a great explanation. The sages teach: "For all of the measures to the Holy One, blessed is He, are measure for measure" (Sanhedrin 90a).

When Hashem decides whether to grant forgiveness to a sinner, He will consider the nature of the person. Is he a forgiving person? Is he a generous person? The answers to these questions play a big role in Hashem's decision regarding their fate in the year to come. In this way, Hashem acts out his justice measure for measure. Hashem acts towards a person the same way that person acts towards others. The activities that mark the start of Yovel may be seen as acts of forgiveness and kindness, such as the freeing of slaves. It is fitting that these acts take place on Yom Kippur, a time when Jews seek forgiveness.

Interestingly enough, the numerical value of ביום - "on that day" (25:9) is 58, which is the same as the word מחטא - cleanse. This would mean that one is being "cleansed for the generous actions of this day." The numerical value of the word in our pasuk הכפרים - "Atonement" is 355. This is the same numerical value as the word, שנה - year. The Torah is hinting to us that this kindness will cleanse us of all our sins from the past year.

SCHAR MITZVAH

ELI LITWIN ('18)

THERE IS AN APHORISM IN THE GEMARA (Kiddushin 39b) that reads: "s'char mitzvah b'hai alma lecha" - "Hashem does not give a person reward in this world for the mitzvot that he does".

How is it possible that our Parsha can begin by stating that if B'nei Yisrael study Torah and perform the mitzvot properly, Hashem will give them bracha in this world?

The Rambam explains that although somebody who properly performs the mitzvot will receive the brachot which are promised by the Torah, these are

not considered his full and primary reward, which he will only receive in Olam Haba. However, when Hashem sees that a person is using all of his strength, energy, and talents to study Torah and do mitzvot, He removes from that person all of the obstacles to serving Hashem, such as sickness, war, and hunger, and He places upon him brachot, such as peace, wealth, and health, which will enable him to spend all of his time performing mitzvot.

In other words, Hashem promises good fortune, bracha, not as the reward for a person's mitzvot, but as a means to free the righteous from mundane and temporal distractions and obligations so that they can continue to do even more mitzvot.

THE LESSONS OF SHMITA

SARA DEICHMAN ('19)

וצויתי את ברכתי לכם בשנה השישית
ועשת את התבואה לשלוש השנים

(25:21)

THIS WEEK'S PARSHA, BEHAR, TEACHES US ABOUT THE MITZVAH OF Shmita, a year without farming or the collection of crops. As stated above, God promises that if this mitzva is kept in the seventh year, a surplus of food, enough to last three years, will be produced in the sixth year. This is clearly a test of trust in God because one is putting total faith in the word of God that his sustenance will be produced.

But what exactly does God mean in saying that the sixth year will yield a crop sufficient for three years?

There are a couple different responses to the question:

Firstly, the Sforno says that someone who follows Shmita will, in return, get three years worth of food in the sixth year. However, if one questions God, they will not benefit and merit the surplus easily. Therefore, the person will have a hard time receiving the crops and will have to work hard for all the food they are gaining in the sixth year. On the other hand, a person who wholeheartedly believes in God will receive the same amount of sustenance as promised,

but will have a much easier time working to attain it. From here we learn how important and beneficial the idea of putting trust in God truly is.

Secondly, Rashi explains that this blessing is not simply for the actual food produced, but is also for the ability to be satisfied and the blessing of satisfaction as a whole. It is important to recognize that we should not aim for materialistic, objective items and qualities, but we should practice the idea of being content. If we are content with what we are given and blessed with, we can be happy, and that is one of the greatest blessings possible in an image-driven society.

In conclusion, may we all not only put our trust in God, but also learn to look past the number of things we are given, and be content with the blessings we are able to count.

A HAPPY ENDING

ELANA SILKIN ('20)

PARASHAT BECHUKOTAI, THE LAST PARSHA IN VAYIKRA, CONTAINS ONE OF THE TWO TOCHACHOT, OR REBUKES, IN THE TORAH. THE TOCHACHA ACTS AS A SORT OF "TERMS OF AGREEMENT" BETWEEN THE JEWS AND GOD, BOILING DOWN THEIR COMPLICATED RELATIONSHIP TO "GOOD THINGS WILL HAPPEN TO YOU IF YOU LISTEN TO ME, AND BAD THINGS WILL HAPPEN TO YOU IF YOU DON'T."

According to the logic of storytelling, Parshat Vayikra should have ended there, and the Jews should have left Har Sinai almost immediately afterwards. But it doesn't. The last perek of Vayikra is one of the most anti-climactic events in the Torah. It contains the discussion of the laws of Arachin, which describe donations to the Beit Hamikdash as being equal to the worth of a person as a slave.

Why does the Torah choose to end Vayikra with such an odd note, as opposed to leaving Har Sinai? There are two possible explanations for this that I would like to explore.

The Latin name for Vayikra, Leviticus, was not pulled randomly out of a hat. The main concerns in Vayikra

are the laws of Kohanim and Leviim, hence the name Torat Kohanim or Leviticus. Thus, Bnei Yisrael may have felt a degree of separation from God, with not being able to positively affect the upkeep of the Beit Hamikdash. Therefore, Moshe sandwiched the laws of Kohanim and Leviim between two sets of other laws that Bnei Yisrael would feel more connected to: Korbanot, which are brought by the people to the Beit Hamikdash, and Arachin, which help stock the financial reserves of the Beit Hamikdash. However, this leads to another question and, ultimately, the second answer: Why end Vayikra with Arachin in particular?

Naturally, being told of future punishment is enough to lower anyone's spirit, especially if that telling lasts about 40 pesukim. (And that is not even the longest one - the one in Parshat Ki Tavo is even longer!) Ending the time spent at Har Sinai on the topic of punishments and sins, as narratively satisfying as it may have been, would have ended the Sefer off on quite the depressing note, something the Tanach tries its hardest not to do. Many other Sefarim in Tanach could have had depressing final pesukim but instead, when we read it outloud, we repeat less gloomy second-to-last pesukim.

Vayikra solves this problem by teaching the laws of Arachin, not because they are convenient - the laws of Korbanot would have been just as suitable - but rather because they are inherently uplifting. The Arachin vow tells the people that they're worth something, both to themselves and to the betterment of society. Their self worth quite literally keeps the holiest place on Earth funded!

As the school year comes to a close and summer looms ahead, many people find themselves panicking. Studying for a final that you think you are going to fail and scurrying around for last minute summer plans after the last three fell through is certainly a good recipe for a bad psychological state. The end of Vayikra is telling you that you have self worth and you have people who you can rely on - and who can rely just as well on you - to start your summer off on the best foot possible. Shabbat Shalom!



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