



Wembley Synagogue

בְּהַר בְּחֻקוֹתַי

Insights from the commentators into the Sidrot of Behar and Bechukotai

Hashem - וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה בְּהַר סִינַי לֵאמֹר.....וְשָׁבְתָה הָאָרֶץ שִׁבְתָּ לָהּ'.....שְׁבֵת שְׁבַתוֹן יִהְיֶה לָאָרֶץ the land shall observe a *Shabbat* rest for G-d... the seventh year shall be a complete rest for the land. (25:1-4)

Rashi asks "what is the connection between the שְׁבֵת שְׁבַתוֹן -the Sabbatical year and Mount Sinai." He answers that just like the case of the Sabbatical year, whose general laws and details were all stated at Sinai, likewise, the general laws and details of all the other mitzvot were also stated at Sinai.

Why did the Torah choose the mitzvah of the Sabbatical year in particular to teach this principle? In his '*Sichot Shabbat Parshat Behar-Bechukotai*' (5748) Rabbi Schneerson ZTL suggests that of all the mitzvot given to the Jewish people, resting the land during the Sabbatical year was one of the last mitzvot to be implemented. Being an agricultural mitzvah it was only observed after the Jewish people entered Eretz Yisrael, forty years after the giving of the Torah. Even then, the agricultural laws did not come into effect until the land was fully conquered and occupied by the Jewish people fourteen years later. And even at that point, the mitzvah of resting the land would not have taken place for a further seven years since the Sabbatical year only occurs after six years of work. Thus, Rav Schneerson says, when the Torah was given at Sinai, the mitzvah of resting the land during the Sabbatical year was one of the least practically relevant mitzvot at the time. Therefore, the Torah taught us here that even the details of this mitzvah were taught at Sinai for if the details of the least practically relevant mitzvah at the time were said at Sinai then it follows that the details of all the other mitzvot were also said at Sinai.(Source: Gutnick Chumash)

וְסַפַּרְתָּ לְךָ שִׁבְעַת שָׁנִים שִׁבְעַת שָׁנִים שִׁבְעַת שָׁנִים שִׁבְעַת שָׁנִים וְהָיוּ לְךָ יָמֵי שִׁבְעַת שָׁבָתוֹת הַשָּׁנִים תִּשְׁעַ וְאַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה
- You shall count for yourself seven cycles of Sabbatical years, seven years seven times; the years of the seven cycles of Sabbatical Years shall be forty-nine years (25:8)

Time is a most precious commodity. Regrettably, we don't always appreciate its value until it is too late. The *Dubno Maggid* applies the above passuk as the basis for a parable which conveys a insightful message. One day, a poor man who went from town to town begging, decided to add up his hard earned pennies. After he spent hours upon hours counting, his pennies amounted to an impressive number. Indeed, he considered himself to be a rich man. He had amassed hundreds of thousands of pennies. It began to go to his head, he was a rich man!

One of his close friends noted his foolishness and said, "You are making a great mistake! During your entire life, your coin of exchange was the penny. You begged for pennies, and you received nothing but pennies. You do not realise, unfortunately, that when you exchange your vast amount of pennies for gold coins, you will find that you have accumulated a meager sum of gold. It takes thousands of pennies to total one gold coin. Indeed, by the gold standard you have accumulated very little."

Rabbi Scheinbaum applies a similar thought to our outlook on life. We think that we have a long time to live – when we divide the average human being's lifespan into days, hours and even minutes. When we think in terms of *Shemittot* and *Yovlot* - Sabbatical and Jubilee year segments, however, how much do we really have? The Torah instructs us to count *Shmittot* and *Yovlot*, seven times seven years. Suddenly, fifty years is no longer a long time. It becomes a single unit – one that passes very quickly. Rav Scheinbaum says, quite conceivably, if our perspective on time were to change, it would simultaneously transform our perspective on life. (Source: Peninim on the Torah)

לָכֵן - כִּי יוֹבֵל הוּא קֹדֶשׁ תִּהְיֶה לָכֵן It is Yovel, it shall be sanctified for you (25:12)

The *Meshech Chochma* asks why it was necessary to extend the planting and harvesting prohibitions of the *Shemitta* (Sabbatical year) into the *Yovel* (Jubilee year) as stated in verse 11. He explains that it is exceedingly difficult for a person to return land to its original owner after he has worked and developed it. His effort can easily lead him to consider the field truly his. The Torah therefore saw fit to sanctify the land during the Yovel year and prohibit anyone from planting or harvesting, rendering whatever produce grows as ownerless so that it may be taken by anyone. Understanding that the produce is not theirs, it becomes easier for the person to see themselves as a temporary tenant and return the field to its original owner. (Source: the Parsha Anthology)

Do not (verbally) harass one another (25:17) - וְלֹא תוֹנוּ אִישׁ אֶת עֲמֻתּוֹ

One of the twenty four mitzvot in this Sidra is the prohibition of אֲנָאָת דְּבָרִים - causing others pain with words. The Gemara in Bava Metzia 58b gives some common examples of this: a person should not ask a merchant about the price of an item for sale if he has no intention of making a purchase. One should not say to Baal Teshuva, "Remember your past deeds." The *Sefer Hachinuch* (338) writes that it is forbidden to oppress a Jew with words. This means that one may not speak any words to a Jew which will distress him and cause him pain when he is powerless to defend himself against these remarks. He adds that this even applies to the verbal abuse of children, unless it is absolutely necessary for educational purposes. In the secular world, violence might mean perhaps shooting or stabbing someone. To Jews, a person can commit violence with his tongue as the verse in Mishlei (Proverbs 12:18) says *ישׁ בִּטָּה קְמַדְקְרוֹת תְּרַב* - "There is the one who speaks harshly like the piercings of a sword." Verbal abuse can cause more pain than physical abuse and often leaves lifelong emotional scars. (Source: *Sefer Ateret Avraham al Hatorah*)

Do not take from him interest... I am Hashem your G-d who took you out of the land of Egypt. (25:36-38). The *Shulchan Aruch (Yoreh Dei'ah, Hilchot Ribit 160:2)* says that someone who lends with interest denies the Exodus from Egypt. What is the connection between the Exodus and lending with interest? At the *בְּרִית בֵּין הַבְּתָרִים* (Covenant Between the Pieces) Avraham was told by Hashem that the Jews would be enslaved in a strange land for 400 years and that "the nation they shall serve I shall judge." If the Egyptians fulfilled Hashem's decree, why were they punished? The *Ra'avad (Teshuvah 6:5)* answers that although the Jews had to work for the Egyptians, they had no permission to *overwork* the Jews with hard labour. For taking more than they were allowed from the Jews (similar to taking interest), they were punished with ten plagues, and the Jews left Egypt with great wealth, after being there only 210 years. A Jew who lends money with interest shows that he believes the Egyptians did nothing wrong and that they did not deserve punishment for the additional hard labor they imposed upon the Jews. Thus, he denies the justification for the accelerated Exodus from Egypt due to the unwarranted hard labour. (Source: *Vedibarta Bam*)

Bechukotai - בְּחֻקֹּתַי

I will provide your rains in their time, **and the land will give** its produce (26:4) - וְנָתַתִּי גֶשְׁמִיכֶם בְּעֵתָם וְנָתַתָּה הָאָרֶץ יְבוּלָהּ

The Torah promises that if the Jewish people will observe the laws of the Torah the rain will fall in its proper time and the land will give forth its produce. There is a difference in the language used in the passuk. The fall of the rain is directly attributed to Hashem ("I will provide your rains") whereas the growth of the produce is attributed to the land ("the land will give its produce"). Why did the Torah write in such a manner? The Gemara *Taanit 2a* states that three activities remain solely in the hands of Hashem and were not given to an intermediary: -i) the granting of rain ii) childbirth and iii) the resurrection of the dead. This explains the language used by the passuk. The giving of rain is stressed as being from Hashem since no intermediary is involved, as opposed to produce which has an intermediary. (Source: R' David Soloveitchik, quoted by Shai L'Torah)

-You will dwell securely in your land. I will provide peace in the land (26:5-6). After the Torah has guaranteed that we will dwell in our land safely, why does it then say I will provide peace in the land? The commentators explain that the reference here is to internal peace within the nation of Israel. The Rabbis tell us that when there is disagreement among Jews, the Satan moves in and begins to carry out his evil among us. If we dwell in our land safely, peacefully and with tolerance toward all our fellow Jews, we can be assured of peace from outside as well. (Source: *Something to Say*)

Shabbat Shalom



Shabbat starts 8.00pm



Shabbat ends: 9.38pm