

OHR NET

SHABBAT PARSHAT BEHAR • 12 IYAR 5765 • MAY 21, 2005 • VOL. 12 NO. 33

PARSHA INSIGHTS

HOLY 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 G-d'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 will I 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 G-d given gifts. The insecurity of exile brings a person face to face with his total dependence on G-d.

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.

PARSHA OVERVIEW

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. Hashem 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 excessive-

ly 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.

FRIENDS IN NEED

Charity is a wonderful thing. Not only does it provide the needy receiver with lifesaving support but provides the giver with lifesaving merit.

There are, however, many levels in the quality of giving. Rambam (Laws of Gifts to the Poor 10:7-12) lists eight different levels. The highest level is the one mentioned in this week's Torah portion. "Should your fellow Jew become impoverished and suffer a downturn in his fortunes," says the Torah (Vayikra 25:35), "you must give him a helping hand."

This means preventing him from falling, explains Rashi in his commentary, because once he falls it is difficult to raise him up again. In practical terms, Rambam elucidates, this

means giving or lending him money, making him a partner or providing him with employment before he sinks to the level of becoming dependent on the public and begging for support.

The statistics of poverty in Israel which make the headlines from time to time serve as reminders of the opportunity Jews here and throughout the world have to serve as "friends in need". If one cannot perform the highest form of charity mentioned by Rambam, he should not hesitate to reach for the lower levels of alleviating the plight of the already dependent. It is charity in any form which will help to save the life of the individual giver and to give life to Israel forever.

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

AN ARMY MARCHES ON ITS MREs

“Before we had kosher MREs (Meals Ready to Eat) I used to travel with suitcases full of tuna fish and dried salami and kosher beef jerky – all sorts of stuff.”

This is how a Jewish chaplain at a Marine Corps Air Base in California describes his battle to observe kashrut while serving in the armed forces. Now he, like other Jewish sol-

diers, has an opportunity to observe the dietary laws with prepackaged rations produced by a Chicago company.

An interesting sideline to this story is that a spinoff of that company produces MREs for soldiers of the Islamic faith to meet their *halal* requirements.

Last year the Pentagon ordered 27,000 cases of kosher and 308,000 cases of *halal* MREs.

LOVE OF THE LAND - THE LEGENDS

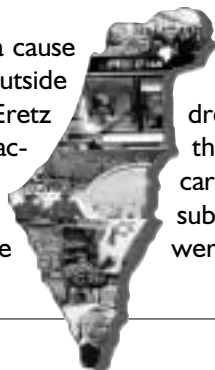
Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael

THE STONE TEST

Last week's 57th Independence Day was a cause for celebration by many Jews inside and outside Israel. The universal Jewish love for Eretz Yisrael and appreciation of its unique holy character finds expression in the story our Sages tell about Rabbi Chanina Hagadol.

On his way to Eretz Yisrael from Babylon he

encountered no signposts or border guards to indicate that he had arrived in the land of his dreams. So he picked up stones along the way and felt their weight. As long as they seemed too light he discarded them. When he finally picked up stones of real substance he kissed them and declared that these were indeed "Eretz Yisrael stones".



OHRNET magazine is published by Ohr Somayach Tanenbaum College

POB 18103, Jerusalem 91180, Israel • Tel: +972-2-581-0315 • Email: info@ohr.edu • www.ohr.edu

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PARSHA Q&A ?

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 sonu ish es amiso* — 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?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

1. 25:1 - To teach us that just as *shemita* was taught in detail on *Har Sinai*, so too, all the *mitzvos* 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 Beis 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 Sukkos 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 Hashem 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 - a) Do not make him perform humiliating tasks; b) Do not sell him publicly; c) 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*.

TALMUDigest

SHABBAT 16 - 22

- Spiritual impurity of vessels
- More of the 18 decrees of Hillel and Shammai
- If vessels must also rest on Shabbat
- Transactions and activities which will be completed on Shabbat
- Cooking and baking before Shabbat
- Wicks and fuels for Shabbat lights
- History and laws of Chanuka
- Sanctity of mitzvah objects
- *Beit Mikdash* Menorah
- Lighting from one lamp to another

WHAT IS CHANUKA?

“What is Chanuka?” asks the *gemara* after already discussing some of the laws pertaining to the lighting of lamps during these eight days.

The meaning of the question, explains Rashi, is “For which miracle was Chanuka established as a holiday?”

Two miracles took place in connection with the suc-

cessful revolt of the Maccabeans against the Hellenistic tyranny which waged war on Jewish religious practice. One was the fact that G-d “delivered the strong into the hand of the weak and the many into the hand of the few”. The other is that the one-day supply of spiritually pure oil the victors found for lighting the Menorah in the *Beit Hamikdash* lasted for eight days until they were able to replenish their supply.

The emphasis which the *gemara* places on the second miracle indicates that this was the principal basis for Chanuka. The question arises, however, why it was established for eight days. There was enough oil to naturally burn for the first day so that the miracle was only for seven days!

Of the scores of resolutions to this problem which have been offered by commentaries throughout the centuries, perhaps the simplest is that we light the Chanukah lamps an extra day in honor of the miraculous military victory for which we also offer thanks to G-d in our *Al Hanissim* prayer.

• *Shabbat 21b*

WHAT THE Sages SAY

“Beit Hillel rule that on the first day of Chanukah we light one lamp and each day we add another, in contrast to Beit Shammai’s position that we begin with eight and go down one each successive day. Their reason is that one must always ascend in spiritual matters and not descend.”

• *The Sage Ulla, Shabbat 21b*

OHR BITS

Witty Advice for Circling Life

“In Germany they came first for the Communists, and I didn’t speak up because I wasn’t a Communist. Then they came for the Jews, and I didn’t speak up because I wasn’t a Jew. Then they came for the trade unionists, and I didn’t speak up because I wasn’t a trade unionist. Then they came for the Catholics, and I didn’t speak up because I was a Protestant. Then they came for me, and by that time no one was left to speak up.”

• *Martin Niemoller*

FREEDOM AND ASSIMILATION

From: Zev Schwartz

Dear Rabbi,

Many Jews heap praises on America as being "A country where Jews can live free from daily fear of persecution. A country where the constitution protects us with freedom of speech, press and religion. The safest country, except for Israel, for Jews to reside in. Without this country most of us would not be alive today." My response is, "What if the United States of America was an evil empire by Jewish standards? What if the USA was comparable to Rome in the days of our forefathers? What if American foreign policy would cause the destruction of Israel, or the metamorphosis of Israel from a Jewish State into a Democratic Multi-ethnic Entity? What if American culture caused the loss of more than 51% of America's Jews every generation? Would it then be permissible for Jews to lavish such praise on a country that does us such devastating harm, just because it lets us worship our religion, and make a few bucks?" What is your opinion?

Dear Zev Schwartz,

Comparing the United States to ancient Rome seems a bit of a stretch of the imagination. Rome was an extremely evil empire that tortured our Rabbis to death, murdered, plundered, destroyed our people, country and our Temple and sent us into the exile we are still in until today.

Regarding assimilation, is the United States to blame? While it is true that many sectors of the Jewish population are sadly assimilating in America, others are thriving. For example, Torah institutions, Yeshivot, Jewish day schools and centers for outreach and Torah study have burgeoned in the U.S. over the last 50 years. So blaming the U.S. for those who assimilate is simply an attempt to shift the burden of guilt.

But to answer your question: Yes, you are allowed to praise even an evil country for its good acts. As an extreme example, Rabbi Yehuda B'rabbi Ilai in the Talmud (Shabbat 33b) praised the Romans for all their beneficial deeds, such as building roads, bridges, sanitation facilities, and markets, even though ancient Rome was an extremely evil empire. If this is so regarding a vicious, antagonistic government such as Rome, all the more so one should appreciate and praise a country like America for its liberties and opportunities, while resisting its tendency toward assimilation and permissiveness.

WHAT'S THE RIGHT THING TO DO?

REAL-LIFE QUESTIONS OF SOCIAL AND BUSINESS ETHICS

IN PURSUIT OF PEACE

Question: I have two close friends who recently got into a fight over what I consider a very insignificant matter. It hurts me to see them so angry at each other and I would love to see them make peace. What is the right thing to do?

Answer: The Sage Hillel urged us to be disciples of Aharon Hakohen who was "a lover of peace and a pursuer of peace". (*Pirkei Avot* 1:12).

Your love of peace which motivates you to effect reconciliation between your friends demonstrates that you are a disciple of Aharon. In pursuing peace it is crucial to use your imagination and to expend every effort. The following two examples from the Talmud may give you an idea:

When Aharon saw two friends who had a fight and parted ways, he went to each of them with the same fabricated

story: "I just came from your old friend and he is terribly upset that he hurt your feelings and is anxious to make peace." When the two of them eventually ran into each other, they embraced and made peace.

The Sage Broka Chazai asked the Prophet Eliyahu if there was anyone in the Bet Luft marketplace where they stood who was a "citizen of the World to Come". He was directed to two brothers whom he asked what special merit they had. "We are happy people who know how to make others happy," they explained. "When we see two people getting into a fight we make both of them laugh and thus restore peace."

Every situation is different and all of us have different talents for peacemaking. But as long as we are genuinely dedicated to pursuing peace, Heaven will help us achieve our goal.