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SHABBAT PARSHAT BEHAR-BECHUKOTAI · 24 IYAR 5770 · MAY 8, 2010 · VOL. 17 NO. 29

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 I will 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.

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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 was 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

JEWISH LAW FOR THE JEWISH STATE

In our *Parshat Mishpatim* issue we quoted what Justice Minister Yaakov Neeman said during a symposium at the Interdisciplinary Center in Haifa about the need to consult Jewish law in order to look at our ethical and cultural roots rather than completely adopt the values of foreign societies.

Several weeks later Neeman was again in Herzliya to speak at an afternoon tea gathering of the Israel-Britain and the Commonwealth Association. The Justice Minister

focused on Jewish law and its place in the legal system, noting that throughout 2,000 years of exile Jews maintained Jewish law and tradition.

“The law is one of the most valuable assets of our national traditions,” he said, “because the basic principles of Jewish law are relevant to a Jewish state.”

It is hoped that his words will as well be heard by Israeli leaders as a recipe for guaranteeing Israel forever.

LOVE OF THE LAND - THE PLACES

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

KEREM MAHARAL – TRIBUTE TO A TORAH GIANT

This settlement south of Haifa was founded in 1949 by newcomers to Israel, mostly from Czechoslovakia. They chose the name Maharal in honor of the great Torah leader of the



Czech capital of Prague, *MAreinu HARAv Loewe*, who lived during the 16th century and left behind important works on Torah law and philosophy.

PARSHA Q&A ?

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?

PARSHA Q&A!

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.

TALMUDigest

- Stealing people and stealing money
- The rebellious judge
- The highest place in the world
- Disputes in the subjects in which the rebellious judge is overruled
- How questions of law were resolved by the courts
- What constitutes a rebellious ruling punishable by death
- Where and when the execution takes place
- False prophets and reluctant ones
- When prophecy of many prophets is suspect
- Which prophet need not perform a wonder to be believed
- The final test of the Patriarch Avraham
- The punishment of a false prophet inciting to idol worship
- Who is denied a share in the World-to-Come
- Proofs from Scripture and nature for resurrection of the dead
- The challenges to our right to Eretz Yisrael

RETURN AND OVERTURN

A prophet who withholds revealing the prophecy granted him, ruled our Sages, is punished with lashes. Rabbi Chisda raised the question as to how it was possible for others to be aware of this prophecy in order to give him the warning that is required to make one liable for such a punishment. The Sage Abaye explained that other prophets would be privy to this prophecy, as it is written: “For the L-rd G-d will not do anything without revealing it to His servants the prophets.” (Amos 3:17)

But, asks the *gemara*, perhaps the Heavenly Host mercifully reversed the harsh decree and withdrew the prophecy? If so, came the reply, this reversal would have been communicated to all of the prophets. This too is challenged by citing the case of the Prophet Yonah. He received a prophecy commanding him to go to Nineveh, capital of the sinful Assyrian Empire, and announce that, “in forty days from now Nineveh will be overturned.” (Yonah 3:4) As we are all familiar with the outcome of this prophecy from our annual reading of the Book of Yonah at the Mincha service on Yom Kippur, Nineveh was indeed spared without Yonah being informed of any reversal.

The response to this challenge is that that prophecy Yonah received was one that Nineveh would be “overturned” — which could be understood that the sinners there would “overturn” their ways by repenting. Yonah made the

misinterpretation that this was a prophecy of destruction. But his call for repentance achieved its goal and “G-d saw in their actions that they had repented their evil ways and G-d reconsidered the evil He had intended for them and did not bring it upon them.” (Yonah 3:10) Only then did the prophet realize that there had been no change in his prophecy requiring notification, but that the initial message from Heaven was that there was an option of “overturning” which could spare Nineveh.

When we hear this historical account read on Yom Kippur we cannot help wondering how a foreigner like Yonah could succeed in arousing the capital of the world’s superpower to repentance by threatening Heavenly destruction. Should someone come forward in our time with such a doomsday prophecy he would probably be placed in a mental institution!

The secret lies in the origins of the city Nineveh. “From that land went out Ashur (founder of the Ashur-Assyrian Empire) and built Nineveh.” (Bereishet 10:11) Rashi explains that Ashur was concerned about the influence which the evil Nimrod, leader of a rebellion against G-d, was having on his children, and therefore moved away to found a new city. A city founded with such noble intentions was thus granted the potential to properly respond to a prophet’s call for return and “overturn” more than a millennium afterwards.

• Sanhedrin 89b

What the SAGES Say

“The punishment of the inveterate liar is that he is not believed even when he tells the truth.”

• Gemara, Sanhedrin 89b

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JEWISH COLD SHOULDER

From: Sheldon

*Dear Rabbi,
Judaism is important to me, but I am not observant. I think the Jewish people should be united, despite differences between them. There are enough who hate us from without that we don't need hate from within. That's why it irks me so to see Orthodox Jews who are so stand-offish to their non-observant brethren. They seem so arrogant as if they have a monopoly on being Jewish. G-d can't possibly condone this type of behavior. What's it all about?*

Dear Sheldon,

To the extent to which your description is accurate, you are entirely right – G-d, the Torah and Judaism do not condone that type of behavior to Jews, or to anyone else for that matter.

However, before offering some possible explanations as to why some may act that way, allow me to differ with your generalization.

The overwhelming number of Orthodox rabbis, individual Jews, synagogues, institutions, websites, organizations and events are very open and receptive to non-observant Jews. Ohr Somayach, whom you chose to direct your query to, is just one of a myriad of such institutions.

So, if you've encountered such behavior, I would sooner attribute it to the misbehavior of individuals than to the shortcomings of Torah Judaism. As in every group

or society, some people are arrogant or condescending, which are common human character traits that everyone is prone to and everyone must strive to overcome. Perhaps you are more sensitive to seeing these traits in Orthodox Jews because they are more conspicuous to you or because you expect more from them (which you should).

If your impression is that this is not limited to individuals, but is rather more a general phenomenon, other explanations may be more accurate. For one, unfortunately, historically the Jewish People have experienced animosity and even existential threat from the outside world. Over millennia, this may have resulted in a subconscious suspicion and fear of anyone or anything "unorthodox" or "outside the fold". Another point to consider is that it has always been very difficult to preserve the unique Jewish way of life, and in many ways the challenge is even greater in modern times.

So, for these two reasons, on a certain level, there may be a general reticence or reluctance among many Orthodox Jews to intermingle with their general surroundings, and even with other Jews. But if so, it's not out of arrogance, but rather out of defensiveness bred by generations of persecution and/or out of a desire to preserve the unique Jewish way of life of a tiny minority from dissolving into the vast majority.

Either way, if and when you encounter this Jewish cold shoulder, don't take it personally. Express empathy and admiration for this segment of your brethren and what they're trying to do for the Jewish People. I guarantee you that more often than not your respect and tolerance will be returned in kind.

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THE STOLEN CASH – PART TWO

Question: In our *Parshat Tetzaveh* issue we quoted Dayan Shlomo Cohen, a member of a rabbinical court in Jerusalem, regarding someone who took a large sum of cash for a colleague to his safety deposit box only to have it stolen on the way through his negligence. Dayan Cohen ruled that the sender could demand payment from his colleague and did not have to make a claim to the insurance company as the colleague insisted.

David Rose subsequently raised the question as to whether the colleague is liable since it is illegal to store cash

in a safety deposit box and asked whether this affects his liability.

Answer: Dayan Cohen replied that although the general rule is that when one commits a sin on behalf of another, the agent is responsible, in this case the agent assumed responsibility for someone else's property and is therefore considered a *shomer* who must guard the object in a safe place. Even if it is illegal to put cash in a safety deposit box, the colleague is obligated to pay for his negligence.

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY _____

THE PAREVE OFFICE AND PAREVE FOOD

Although the term *pareve* to us means a neutral food matter which is neither meat nor milk, the term originates from the name of one of the offices in the *Beit Hamikdash*.

Different explanations are offered by our commentaries for this unusual name. In his commentary the Bartenura writes that this office was built through magic by a magician named Pareve and therefore bore his name. Rambam's explanation is that Pareve was a curious magician who

tunneled his way into the Holy of Holies to observe the service of the Kohen Gadol on Yom Kippur and was slain for this violation, and the scene of his crime was named for him to discourage others from doing the same.

There is a popular assumption that because this office was in a holy area but not really sanctified as its neighboring vicinity, but rather used for salting the skins of sacrificed animals, its name connotes something of being in-between.

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