



The Marcos and Adina Katz YUTORAH IN PRINT

Behar 5784

Sons and Servants

Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm z"l (Originally delivered May 19, 1973)

After banning a permanent slave class among Israelites by legislating that every Israelite servant must be emancipated on the Jubilee year, the Torah offers its reason:

כי לי בני ישראל עבדים, “for the children of Israel are servants unto Me, they are My servants.”

The title עבד or servant is obviously meant in an honorific sense. Thus, the highest encomium that the Bible offers for Moses, that most superior of all prophets and humans, is, משה עבד השם, Moses the servant of the Lord.

There is also another description of man's relationship to God used by the Torah: בנים אתם לה' אלקיכם, “you are sons (or children) to the Lord your God.” So we have an interesting biblical typology: עבד and בן, son and servant, two symbols or archetypes of the religious personality.

Unquestionably, in one sense *eved* (servant) is superior to *ben* (son). “Servant” indicates one who has no natural relationship, but has come to his master-father from without. The *eved* of the Lord is one who therefore comes to the אדון עולם (the Eternal Lord) voluntarily, utterly of his own free will, ready to subjugate himself to the will of the Almighty, to suppress his ego and restrain his desires in manifest and meaningful commitment to God. “Son,” however, is one who, as it were, was born into this relationship with his Father. From this point of view, the proselyte is superior to the native-born Jew! Indeed, in a famous responsum or תשובה by Maimonides to Obadiah the Proselyte, who complained that his Jewish teacher was rebuking him and insulting him by reminding him of his pagan origin, Maimonides says that the teacher should be ashamed of himself, and should stand in awe of the student who is proselyte and who came to the Almighty of his own free will rather than being born into it naturally.

And yet the weight of the Jewish tradition offers the reverse judgment, and maintains that the category of *ben* is superior to the category of *eved*. Thus R. Akiva teaches

in the Ethics of the Fathers, חביבין ישראל שנקראו בנים למקום, “beloved is Israel that they were called sons of the Almighty.”

What is the difference between these two conceptions, that of man as *eved* and as *ben* to God? Let us discuss three of them.

The first analysis is objective rather than subjective. It tells us how Judaism considers man as such, in all his weakness and his frailty, rather than how man conceives himself subjectively as a religious being in his relationship to God.

And here we turn to R. Akiva himself in a fascinating dialogue, recorded in the Talmud (B.B. 10a), between R. Akiva and his Roman tormentor, who was later to become the executioner of the venerable sage – Rufus, the agent of the Emperor Hadrian, and a man known in Jewish literature as Tyranus Rufus, “the tyrant Rufus,” a name usually accompanied by the epithet הרשע, the wicked one:

וְזוֹ שְׂאֵלָה שֶׁאֵל טוֹרְנוּסְרוּפּוֹס הִרְשָׁע אֶת רַבִּי עֲקִיבָא: אִם אֱלֹהֵיכֶם אוֹהֵב עֲנִיִּים הוּא, מִפְּנֵי מָה אֵינוֹ מַפְרִינָם? אָמַר לוֹ: כְּדֵי שְׂנִיאוֹל אֲנוּ בְּהוֹ מְדִינָה שֶׁל גִּיּוֹנִים. אָמַר לוֹ: [אֲדַרְבֶּהּ], זֶה שְׂמַחֲיִיבְתָּן לְגִיּוֹנִים! אֲמַשּׁוּל לָךְ מִשָּׁל, לָמָּה הִדְבַּר דּוֹמָה? לְמַלְךְ בֶּשֶׂר וְדָם שֶׁכַּעַס עַל עֲבָדָיו, וְחִבְשׁוֹ בְּבֵית הָאֲסוּרִין, וְצוּהָ עָלָיו שֶׁלֹּא לְהִאָּכִילוֹ וְשֶׁלֹּא לְהִשְׁקוֹתוֹ. וְהִלֵּךְ אָדָם אֶחָד וְהִאָּכִילוֹ וְהִשְׁקָהוּ. כְּשֶׁשָּׁמַע הַמֶּלֶךְ, לֹא כּוֹעֵס עָלָיו? וְאַתָּם קְרוִינֵי עֲבָדִים, שְׂנֵאָמַר: “כִּי לִי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל עֲבָדִים!” אָמַר לוֹ רַבִּי עֲקִיבָא, אֲמַשּׁוּל לָךְ מִשָּׁל: לָמָּה הִדְבַּר דּוֹמָה? לְמַלְךְ בֶּשֶׂר וְדָם שֶׁכַּעַס עַל בְּנוֹ וְחִבְשׁוֹ בְּבֵית הָאֲסוּרִין, וְצוּהָ עָלָיו שֶׁלֹּא לְהִאָּכִילוֹ וְשֶׁלֹּא לְהִשְׁקוֹתוֹ. וְהִלֵּךְ אָדָם אֶחָד וְהִאָּכִילוֹ וְהִשְׁקָהוּ. כְּשֶׁשָּׁמַע הַמֶּלֶךְ, לֹא דוֹרוֹן מִשְׁגֵּר לוֹ? וְאַנְּנָן קְרוִינֵי בְּנִים, דְּכֹתִיב: “בְּנִים אַתֶּם לַה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם”

This question was posed by Tyranus Rufus the wicked to R. Akiva: if indeed your God loves the poor, as you say, why does He not provide for them? R. Akiva answered: so that we might thereby be saved from punishment of Gehinom (for in sharing one's substance with the poor and in helping the disadvantaged we affirm our worth in life and thus save ourselves from eternal perdition). To this Tyranus Rufus replied: on the contrary, for doing so you deserve to go to Gehinom! I will offer you a

parable: it can be compared to a human king who became angry with one of his servants and placed him in prison and ordered that he be given no food and no drink. Along came another man and brought in food and drink to the imprisoned slave. When the king hears about this, is he not angry with this stranger who violated his rules? And you Israelites are called servants, as it is written, “for the children of Israel are servants unto Me.” To this R. Akiva responded: on the contrary, I will offer you a different parable. It can be compared to a human king who became angry with his son and placed him in prison and commanded that he not be given any food and drink. Along came a stranger and brought in food and drink to the imprisoned son. When the king hears about this, is he not so happy that he is willing to send a gift to this stranger? And we are called sons, as it is written, “you are sons to the Lord your God.”

If we see man as an *eved*, as a passive and servile creation of God, then we are fatalists. Then we must declare that whatever exists is the inexorable will of God, and that is the way it must remain. In that case, the poor must remain poor, the sick must remain miserable, and the sufferers must continue to suffer, all because this is the will of God. Any attempt to relieve or improve their condition is considered sacrilegious and a blasphemous interference with God’s plans for the world. This philosophy of man as *eved* is the most convenient ideology for the establishment, the “haves” to keep control over the “have-nots.”

But Jews do not subscribe to this *eved* anthropology; that is the way Rufus and his Romans and pagans speak. R. Akiva, however, declared that man is a *ben*, that men are children of God, and then we must interpret all evil and suffering as a challenge to us to remove it, as if God did indeed create a flawed world, but willed that his human creatures look upon each other as children of God and therefore free the imprisoned and the disadvantaged and the hungry and the poor from their distress and affliction. God made this world, but He is anxious that we make it better. God started this world, he wants us to complete it.

So whereas man should see himself as an *eved*, he must always see others as *ben*. Therefore, in general, as R. Akiva taught, *ben* is superior to *eved*, and this theory becomes the foundation of all of Judaism, which urges us to treat every man as a child of God, therefore as a brother and sister, as one whose welfare and happiness God desires and commands to enhance.

There is a second definition of this dichotomy of *eved-ben*. In this definition, the two terms describe not only how we ought to view other men, but they are archetypes of

how a Jew should relate to God and to Judaism. Thus, as one great Jew of recent generations said, the *eved* does only what he has to, only what he must, only what he is told to do; whereas the *ben* seeks to satisfy his Father even beyond what he was ordered to do. The *eved* does what the master demands, the son does what the father wants. The *eved* is interested in the mitzvah (commandment) alone; the *ben* also seeks to perform the ratzon (will) of his Creator. As an example: the Torah commands that whenever we have a four-cornered garment that we affix thereto the כנף or fringes. The *eved* will say: since I do not have such a garment, it is unnecessary for me to wear the ציצית. And he is right, halakhically. But he is a minimalist, doing only what he must and no more. The *ben*, under similar circumstances, will seek out a four-cornered garment in order to be able to perform the law of affixing the ציצית. The son is a maximalist, he goes beyond what he must, he reaches out for the supererogatory.

The third definition, this too a category of religious personality, and based upon a modification of what the Zohar teaches. The Zohar tells us that both terms are indicative of high religious personalities, and that ultimately סוד עבד וסוד הבן, the mystery of each, is really one. But in appearance they are different. The *eved* is a description of conduct or behavior, one who performs all the commandments fully, whereas *ben* not only performs the commandments but feels at home with God. He is מחפש בגנוי אביו, he knows all the nooks and corners of his Father’s treasure house, and seeks not only to execute his Father’s will in practice, but also to know as much as he can about his Father. What the Zohar means is that the *eved* is one who performs the Halakhah, who does all the practical commandments, whereas the *ben* is the one who pursues the סתרי תורה, the mysteries of the Torah, or, in other words, is an initiate into the Kabbalah or mysticism.

In contemporary terms, we may modify that statement to mean not one who is a mystic, but that the *eved* is one who practices alone, but not necessarily with feeling; whereas the *ben* is one who invests emotion and feeling and love. The *eved* is a Jew who observes and gives and participates, but you can feel the icicles hanging from his heart. The *ben* is a Jew who not only observes and gives and participates, but also worries and loves and feels, who puts in heart and soul into what he does.

We thus have three interpretations of the distinctions between the terms *ben* and *eved*, all of which relate to the superiority of *ben* over *eved*. To summarize: the first definition is that, relating to others, we must see them as

sons, and therefore as individuals whom God loves and whom God wants us to help out of their distress even if they deserve their misery; and not as servants whom God does not care about, or desires that they remain in their punishment. The second is that the *eved* is a minimalist who does only what he must, whereas the *ben* is a maximalist who goes beyond his minimal requirements. And finally, the *eved* is a Jew who carries out everything in practice, but not necessarily with the feeling and inner participation that characterize the son.

As a rabbi of an Orthodox congregation, it is often my very unpleasant duty to reproach not only my congregation but the entire Orthodox community, and especially what we call Modern Orthodox Jews. Today, however, for the sake of proper proportion and perspective and to complete the picture, permit me to assert that despite all its shortcomings, it is this community of Orthodox and especially Modern Orthodox Jews which, in the context of our times, represents the quality of *ben* as opposed to *eved*.

At a time such as ours when other Jews who were long blind to the Jewish destiny have become hysterical, and speak so breathlessly of “Jewish identity” and “Jewish survival,” Orthodox Jews go far beyond that, and are striving for infinitely more than these bare minimum qualities of identity and survival. בנים אתם לה' אלקיכם, and our concern as children of Israel and of God is with the study of Torah and the performance of mitzvot, not merely with that elusive and intangible and insubstantial “identity” and “survival.”

Moreover, by the same token, while at her fine Jews are panic-stricken and motivated by a fear for the Jewish future, grasping at all kinds of artificial devices, and acting as if merely crash-financing a program which reaches out “to the young” will solve all problems, Orthodox Jews approach their Judaism not exclusively as a communal matter, but also with אהבה, with inner feeling and total commitment as a supreme personal way of life which demands warmth and love.

And at least for Modern Orthodox Jews, for most of them and for most of the time, although not for all of them all the time, we have learned how to view other, recalcitrant Jews as בנים and not as עבדים. We may be distressed at their non-observance and their lack of religion, but we recognize them as children of God, and therefore as our brothers and

our sisters. And we shall not give up on them!

Within the community that embodies these conceptions and that typifies these attitudes, the most representative segment is Yeshiva University, an institution which is more than 75 years old. Orthodoxy in America, and especially Orthodoxy that has come to terms with the modern experience, is unthinkable without Yeshiva University.

An amazing thing happened several months ago, and the Israeli press commented in almost disbelief upon this event. When Prime Minister Golda Meir visited this country, she received an honorary degree from Yeshiva University. After her reception, in the office of Dr. Belkin, Golda Meir – wept! She said that she had never seen such a youth, that she had never believed it could exist even in Israel. She saw thousands of young men and women, an overwhelmingly impressive community, which left her breathless. Here were young people devoted to maximal Jewishness, not to just surviving or identifying; young people who obviously were effusive in their love and devotion for Israel and Torah and the State of Israel, with warmth and enthusiasm. And here were Orthodox Jews, fully committed to Torah and Judaism, who nevertheless had about them an openness to other Jews – not by avoiding the issues, not by being pliant and submissive, not by accepting uncritically anything that all Israelis or the government or Golda Meir does or says, but young people who are aware that all Jews are בנים למקום.

Why did Golda weep? Because she discovered then and there, in the encounter with Yeshiva University, that חביבין ישראל שנקראו בנים למקום, that these charming and lovely young people were indeed children of God and of Israel. She saw these vibrant and enthusiastic, uncompromised and proud Jews, Jews whose way of life she once may have thought existed as cultural relics only in Meah Shearim or else in the Russian ghettos she left as a child – who nevertheless had not abandoned the Jewish tradition, who were able to combine it with a worldly outlook, who were college and graduate university students. And withal, they are בני תורה and even בנות תורה.

She saw before herself not עבדים but בנים. Indeed, that was something to cry about, דמעות של שמחה, tears of joy. For she found sons, not merely servants.

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Run Silent, Run Deep

Rabbi Joshua (The Hoffer) Hoffman z"l

This week's parsha, Behar, begins with the mitzvos of shemittah, the seventh year in a recurring cycle, during which it is prohibited to work the fields in Eretz Yisroel, and of yovel, which occurs on the fiftieth year, after the completion of seven cycles of shemittah, and, among other things, also prohibits working those fields. After these laws, the Torah presents us with a series of laws regarding the selling of one's ancestral field, of his house, and, eventually, of himself as a slave. Rashi, toward the end of the parsha (Vayikra 26:1), citing the Talmud (Kiddushin, 20a), writes that the laws recorded in our parsha follow a sequential order. First, we are informed of the prohibitions of shemittah. If someone desired money and did business with shemittah produce, he will eventually need to sell his movable property. If he repents, the cycle stops there. However, if he persists in his halachic violations, he will need to sell his land, and then his house, and then he will find a need to borrow on interest - another Torah prohibition - and then sell himself to a Jew as a slave, and eventually, sell himself to a non-Jew as a slave. All of these laws, then, seem to fit into the context of the shemittah and yovel laws. However, it is interesting to note that the Torah here mentions another law that, ostensibly, is not inherently connected to the laws of shemittah. The Torah tells us, "If your brother becomes impoverished and his hand falters 'with you' (imach), you shall hold on to him ... Do not take from him interest and increase" (Vayikra 25:35-36). Although, in context, we are being told to make an interest-free loan to the person who has encountered hard times, and these verses thus fit into the pattern that Rashi mentions later, the midrash sees verse 35 in a wider context as referring to the wider mitzvoh of tzedekoh, or 'charity,' as it is usually translated. I believe that a deeper understanding of the mitzvoh of shemittah will help us see a dimension of tzedekoh that we would not have appreciated if it had not appeared in this context.

The Midrash Rabbah in the beginning of Vayikra (1:1) cites Rav Yitzchok, who likens those people who observe the laws of shemittah to angels and warriors of great strength. Rabbi Yitzchok explains that the verse in Tehillim (103:20), "... His (God's) angels, the strong warriors who do His bidding, to obey the voice of His word..." refers to those who keep the shemittah. He goes on to explain why those who keep the shemittah are referred to as angels and strong warriors: "Usually when a person fulfills a mitzvoh,

it is for a short period of time, sometimes for a day, or maybe a month, but does he do so for the rest of the days of the year? This person sees his field wasted; his vineyard wasted; still he has to pay taxes, nevertheless he is silent. Is there a stronger man than this? " Rabbi Chaim Ya'akov Goldvicht, zt"l, founding Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshiva Kerem B'Yavneh in Israel, noted that the focus in this midrash seems to be on the silence of the shemittah observers, in the face of the condition of their untilled fields. This silence, he says, echoes the reaction of the Jewish nation at Mt. Sinai, when they were told that God would be giving them the Torah. They responded, 'we will do (the mitzvos) and we will listen.' When God heard these words, he asked, "who revealed the secret of the angels to my children?" Rav Goldvicht explains that angels, by their very nature, do God's will in silence, without question. This is why the verse in Tehillim cited by the midrash refers to angels as those who do God's bidding. Human beings, however, are accustomed to examine a matter with their own intellect before accepting it. The Jewish nation, however, reacted to the giving of the Torah with complete acceptance and willingness to do God's will, thus resembling the angels who do God's bidding. This reaction bespoke an understanding of the nature of the Torah. The midrash (Bereishis Rabbah 1:2) tells us that God looked into the Torah and created the world. The meaning behind this is that the laws of nature were made in conformity with the laws of the Torah. When people observe the mitzvos of the Torah, the natural world responds in a way that facilitates this observance. Thus, when the Jewish nation observes the laws of shemittah, the land responds by yielding enough produce for three years.

The silence of the heroic shemittah observers that is praised in the midrash, continues Rav Goldvicht, should be seen in contrast to those who the Torah visualizes as voicing their apprehension, as the shemittah year approaches, that they will have no produce to live on because of their observance of the applicable laws. To calm these fears, the Torah assures them that the land will produce, in the sixth year, enough for three years (Vayikra 25:20-22). Rav Goldvicht explains that those who are silent when facing the shemittah year are on a higher level than the people referred to directly in the Torah, because they understand that the Torah is the blueprint of the world, and it was created in a way that would make it possible for them to observe the laws of shemittah, letting their land lay fallow

and still producing all that they need to subsist. They thus retain their silence in face of the approaching sabbatical year, firm in their belief that they will not go lacking (see Ohr Gedalyohu by Rav Gedalyohu Schorr, for a somewhat different approach to the significance of the silence referred to in the midrash).

There is, actually a deeper dimension of Rav Goldvicht's explanation of the midrash in Bereishis Rabbah which he does not point out, but which is developed by Rav Avrohom Yitzchok Bloch, who was the Rosh HaYeshivah of the Telshe Yeshivah in pre-war Lithuania. Rabbi Bloch wrote that when the midrash tells us that God looked into the Torah and created the world, it is saying that the personality of the Jew was created in conformity with the laws of the Torah. Thus, when a Jew observes the laws of the Torah, he is really actualizing his inner self. Based on this analysis of Rabbi Bloch, we can explain the silence of the Jewish people when they were given the Torah at Mt. Sinai as being reflective of an inner awareness that by observing the mitzvos of the Torah, they were all bringing out their true, inner personalities, and, as a result, they fell silent, overtaken by the feeling of tranquility and inner peace that comes when one is being true to himself. This is also the reason that the people who observe shemittah remain silent as they see their land going unworked for an entire year. Since this is what the Torah commands them to do, they understand that it is exactly what they need for their own personal fulfillment, and their feeling of inner peace says all that needs to be said. Based on this understanding, I believe that we can now return to the mitzvoh of tzedokoh,

as presented in parshas Behar, and understand why it is mentioned within the context of the laws of shemittah.

As we have seen, the mitzvoh of tzedokoh in parshas Behar is phrased, "If your brother becomes impoverished and his hand falters 'with you' (imach), you shall hold on to him." The word 'imach' - with you - needs to be understood. In what way is this man's financial failure considered as being 'with you?' Rav Eliyohu Meir Bloch, brother of Rav Avrohom Yitzchok Bloch, and one of the two leaders who brought the Telshe Yeshivah to Cleveland, Ohio, in the 1940s, explained, based on various midrashim, that the mitzvoh of giving tzedokoh is really more for the benefit of the giver than of the receiver. The primary character trait that typifies the Jewish people, he says, is that of chesed, of doing acts of loving-kindness. This trait was given over to us from our forefather Avrohom, and is part of our inner personality. The essence of this trait is a need to give to others. Avrohom felt a need to give even when there weren't any needy people in sight, and, so, God sent him angels in the guise of nomadic travelers so that he would be able to actualize this inner need. Avrohom, in this way, was emulating God, whose nature is to give, and he gave this trait over to the nation that he engendered. Thus, when a Jew gives tzedokoh, he is bringing out part of his inner self, as inherited from his forefather Avrohom. In this way, the mitzvoh of tzedokoh is appropriately placed in parshas Behar, which teaches us how to bring out our inner nature in a very stark form, by leaving our land fallow during shemittah and yovel with a sense of inner peace.

Tzedakah

Rabbi Assaf Bednarsh (Transcribed by TurboScribe.ai and adapted by a talmid from the YUTorah shiur originally presented at Gruss Kollel in Yerushalayim on May 7, 2015)

In this week's Parsha, when discussing giving tzedakah and helping people financially, the pasuk says: *Ki yamuch achicha u-mata yado imach*—your destitute brother will be with you. Shevet Sofer, the grandson of Chasam Sofer, says: What is the chidush of *u-mata yado imach*? It means that it is not enough just to do something to help a poor Jew. Imach means you must be together with him. Try to feel what he is going through, put yourself in his shoes, and empathize with him. Likewise, the pasuk says in Mishpatim: *Im kesef talve es ami, es he-ani imach*. And the Mefarshim say: What is the chidush of *es he-ani imach*? That it is not enough to just lend money. You should really feel together with the person. Based on this, Shevet Sofer has

a very interesting chidush. The Gemara says that the *Agra de-taneisa tzidkasa*—the ikar sechar of the ta'anis is giving tzedakah. Why is this so? The Rav taught us that the ikar sechar of the ta'anis might be teshuvah or tefillah—a special kind of tefillah. So, what is Gemara teaching us here? You can give tzedakah any day. The Shevet Sofer explains that the Gemara is teaching that the unique sechar you can get out of a ta'anis is that you feel hungry. There are people who feel hungry and do not have food to eat. And you never feel hungry because you always have enough money. So what can you do to really feel for them? Do not just use the ta'anis to improve your Bein Adam Le-Makom. You should use the ta'anis to feel what it is like to be hungry. And this way, you

can empathize more and understand what it feels like for people who do not have food to eat. And as a result, you will give more tzedakah.

And I think that this is also meduyak in the Haggadah. It is interesting that we start Magid in the Haggadah with *Ha lachma anya dee achalu avhasana be-ara de-Mitzrayim*. And then we say: *Kol dichfin yeisei ve-yeichol, kol ditzrich yeisei ve-yifsach*. There is much discussion about why we say *Kol dichfin yeisei ve-yeichol* precisely at this point in the Haggadah. But it could be linked to *Ha lachma anya dee achalu avhasana be-ara de-Mitzrayim*—this is the poor bread we ate in Mitzrayim. We remind ourselves of the aspect of matzah, called lechem oni, that reminds us of the poverty we endured in Mitzrayim. And once we remember how poor we were in Mitzrayim, then we can wholeheartedly say *Kol dichfin yeisei ve-yeichol, kol ditzrich yeisei ve-yifsach*. Whoever is hungry, come and eat; whoever is needy, come in and share what we prepared. Because if you recall and think of what it is like to be poor and not have, then you can

really feel for others. That is what the Shevet Sofer takes out from this Parsha. *U-mata yado imach*. Do your best to feel the privations of the pauper. And perhaps the purpose of a ta'anis is to experience that. And if you are medayek in the Haggadah, maybe that is part of the whole idea of Zechiras Yetzias Mitzrayim—to remember that we were once poor and oppressed, and then it will be easier to empathize with those who need your help.

The Rav mentioned this theme numerous times, that part of the kiyum of Zechiras Yetzias Mitzrayim is to remember that we were oppressed, mistreated, and poor. And that is why, throughout the generations, the Jews have been such rachmanim, so involved in helping others, and so active in chesed and tzedakah. Because when we remember and think a little about what it feels like not to have, we can properly mikayem *ki yamuch achicha u-mata yado imach*. .*v'chei achicha imach*. And then we will be ready and willing to really help those in need to the fullest extent.

Shabbat Shalom.

Radical Reliance

Rabbi Dr. Mordechai Schiffman

In Parshat Behar, the idea of the Sabbatical year, both its restrictions and aspirational values, are delineated in detail. The verses convey psychological attunement to the fact that not working the land for an entire year would engender anxiety. How would individuals and the broader society be economically sustained? Anticipating this mindset, the verse states, “And should you ask, “What are we to eat in the seventh year, if we may neither sow nor gather in our crops?” (Lev. 25:20). The Torah validates, accepts, and expects the natural human desire for financial security and predictability. God, in turn, makes a guarantee in the next verse that there will be enough produce.

Even with this assurance, Rabbi Yitzhak applies the verse in Psalms that blesses the “mighty of strength who perform his bidding” (103:20) to those who observe the sabbatical year (Vayikra Rabbah 1:1). That midrash continues: “The way of the world is that a person performs a commandment for one day, for one week, for one month. But does one do so for the rest of the days of the year? Yet this one sees his field fallow, his vineyard fallow, and pays his land tax and remains silent. Is there anyone mightier than that?” Commitment, connection, and dedication to religious goals often ebb and flow through the course of the calendar. It is the consistent and constant necessity to maintain active faith, throughout the sabbatical year that is

worthy of praise. Mere lip service or theoretical allegiance will not suffice. Those who observe the sabbatical year have genuine trust in God.

Betach, safety and security, is a key word within the narrative. In three successive verses, God assures that the Israelites will dwell safely in the land if they perform the requisite laws (Lev. 25:18-20). While the literal meaning indicates that God will provide physical security, there is also a sense of aspirational psychological safety embedded in the language. According to Sefer HaChinuch, one of the pedagogical goals of the sabbatical year is to inculcate a sense of bitachon, trust in God. Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz elaborates on the importance of trusting in God to provide during the sabbatical year, noting that the verse quoted in the midrash above begins: “Bless the Lord, you angels of His, you mighty of strength who perform His bidding.” Those “mighty of strength” who observe the sabbatical year are called angels. Generalizing this to all aspects of life, Rabbi Shmuelevitz inspires readers to accept an almost angelic trust in God’s plan.

A key component of Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) is radical acceptance. When we can’t change ourselves, others, or our circumstances, we are encouraged to accept reality as is, in its totality. This mindset could decrease emotional turmoil and allow us to focus our

energies on attainable goals. In spiritual and religious terms, we might call this “radical reliance.” We seek to place our faith completely in God’s hands.

One strategy used by DBT to inculcate radical acceptance is called willing hands. When we are tense, anxious, or angry, we often clench our hands together tightly. Willing hands is the conscious decision to change our body posture to foster a different attitude physically and emotionally. By unclenching and consciously opening our hands in a calming and relaxing manner, we welcome acceptance of our circumstances.

In her book, *The Hidden Order of Intimacy*, Dr. Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg regards the sabbatical year as a symbol of relinquishing control. She notes that the sabbatical

year in Hebrew, *shemittah*, means “release, remission, the relaxing of tension.” Building off the description of the sabbatical year in Deuteronomy, she states that “the physical imagery of clenching and relaxing is repeatedly evoked.” Our hands are supposed to be open, not tightened or hardened. This encourages a “phenomenology of openness” to counteract “rigid emotional muscles” that would otherwise “have the power to abort blessing.”

Shemittah serves as a model for working on opening our willing hands and increasing our trust in God. Inculcating this value can assuage our anxieties and leave us emotionally open to connect meaningfully to God and to others.

Better to Ask Permission than Forgiveness

Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

It’s been said, “It’s easier to seek forgiveness than permission.” Why enable people to block our plans? Better to just do it, and apologize for the hurt feelings afterward. From a utilitarian perspective this is logical; everything will work out. But there is a cost to inflicting pain, as Ramban conveys in explaining a mitzvah in our parshah.

The context is the law of *ona’ah*, which prohibits abuse of financial power:

- In discussing selling land, Vayikra 25:14-17 teaches that a seller may not demand more than the going rate, and a buyer may not insist on paying less than the going rate. Such financial impropriety is called *ona’ah*. [There is much discussion regarding how the “going rate” is set.]
- The Talmud adds that if *ona’ah* is particularly extreme, with a great difference between the sale price and the going rate, then the beneficiary of the *ona’ah* is obligated to reverse the sale. (Bava Metzia 49b-50a)

The gemara (ibid. 56a-57b) limits this law: the rules of *ona’ah* do not apply to sales of land. Buyers routinely forgive an unusually high price for land, because the enduring character of real estate makes it easier to swallow an exorbitant price. [See *Sefer haChinuch* #337.] But

excluding real estate from *ona’ah* is strange; the Torah presented the law of *ona’ah* in the context of land sales! How could *ona’ah* not apply to land?

Ramban (Vayikra 25:14-15) points out the problem, and tries to solve it. He suggests that there are two layers to the law:

- The Torah’s text prohibits engaging in *ona’ah*, without imposing a penalty. This indeed applies to all sales, including real estate.
- The rabbis then enacted a rule reversing particularly egregious *ona’ah*. That rabbinic legislation doesn’t apply to land, because people who buy land accept that they may need to pay a higher price.

Ramban’s explanation acknowledges that in the end, people are likely to accept the painful need to overpay in a real estate deal. This is why the sages did not reverse an executed sale of real estate. But to the person who is contemplating overcharging for land since the buyer will get over it, the Torah warns: don’t inflict pain in the first place. Causing others pain is not acceptable, even if we know they will forgive us in the end. And if this is true in business, how much more so in our families and communities! Better to ask permission than to seek forgiveness afterward.

Relinquishing Ownership to G-d

Mrs. Michal Horowitz

This week's parsha, Parshas Behar, teaches us about the mitzvos ha'te'luyos ba'Aretz (the land dependent mitzvos) of Shemitta and Yovel - the seventh Sabbatical year and the fiftieth Jubilee year. During these years, which are only applicable in the Land of Israel, all land lays fallow. The landowner is not allowed to seed, sow, harvest or reap, and does not act as the owner of the land during this year. The fruits of the trees and produce of the field are his for eating, as well as for anyone else who wishes to take from the produce. Shemittah and Yovel teach us that *הָאָרֶץ - כִּי-לִי* - for the whole earth is Mine (Vayikra 25:23); the fields, the fruits, the grains, and the vegetables all belong to Hashem.

These years are a powerful reminder that it is G-d, and not man, Who runs the world and all that is in it - *לִהּ הָאָרֶץ וְכָל-אֲשֶׁר בָּהּ* - *to Hashem is the land and its fulness, the world and all who dwell in it* (Tehilim 24:1).

So often in life, we forget Who is in charge. I once heard a beautiful hashkafic idea on the meaning of why we daven three times a day: Shachris, Mincha and Arvis. In a powerful statement, Rabbi Menachem Penner (Executive Vice President of the Rabbinical Council of America, the RCA) explained that "it only takes a few hours for a man to think he is in charge." Hence, from the time we daven the morning tefillah of Shachris, until the afternoon when we daven mincha, we start to rely on our power, wisdom and success. Just like the Shemittah and Yovel years, Tefillah thrice daily reminds us that all that we have is from Hashem, and that He is the Sustainer, Provider and Controller of all.

Yes, man must exert effort and do his normal hishtadlus (effort to succeed and produce) in this world; ain som'chin al ha'neis - we do not rely on miracles. And today, it is true that manna does not fall from heaven every morning to take care of our physical needs. And so, the Torah commands and permits that for six days, and six years, work shall be done, but on the seventh day, and in the seventh year, all work ceases. For no one can accomplish even one iota more than what G-d decrees or wills, and no amount of extra effort can override the Rulership of Hashem, our Creator and Provider.

The Torah warns us that when we become satiated (Devarim 8:10) and successful (Devarim 8:12-13) the yetzer harah (evil inclination) of kochi v'otzem yadi asah li es ha'chayil ha'zeh, the strength and might of my hand

made me this wealth (8:17) is a powerful enemy against emunah, faith, in Hashem.

Shemittah and Yovel, and the mentality they teach us (even when it's not a Shemittah or Yovel year) allow us to recalibrate spiritually and reconsider Who is in charge.

Rabbi Samson Rafael Hirsch teaches, "The difference between Sheviis (the 7th Sabbatical year) and Shabbos (the weekly 7th day of rest) hinges on the difference in their meaning. Shabbos expresses homage to G-d as the Creator and King of the universe. Man subordinates himself - and all the powers at his disposal to control the world - to G-d. Man ceases from creation when he recalls G-d's creation. Hence, all exercise of creative power over matter is considered melacha (work) which is prohibited on Shabbos...

"Sheviis, on the other hand, expresses homage to G-d as the Master of the Land of Israel, and for this purpose it suffices to subordinate the land to G-d's rule. A man in Israel remembers that his land belongs to G-d, and that he is merely a stranger and a sojourner with G-d; he then neither works his land nor gathers in its produce to ensure his livelihood. When he ceases sowing and pruning, and when he refrains from reaping the produce that grows on its own, so as to bring it into his home, his land does not provide his livelihood that year.

"Thus, the soil of the whole country is stamped as ownerless, and for a whole year declares before all that (the nation of) Israel is not master of its land. As our Sages put it: Omer HKB" *H l'Yisrael, zaro shesh vi'hash'mitu sheva, k'dei she'teidu she'ha'Aretz sheli hi* - Hashem said to Israel, sow in the sixth year, and rest/cease in the seventh year, so that you will know that the earth is Mine (Sanhedrin 39a)" (RSRH commentary to Vayikra 25:4).

"Sefiras Shemittah v'Yovel of the nation signifies that through seven Sabbath years the nation pays homage to G-d as the Owner of its national land. On this basis it strives seven times toward internal political freedom, rendering itself worthy of the Yovel rebirth of the state. Accordingly, the Torah tells us that: you shall count for yourself seven Sabbath years, and these seven periods shall, at the same time, form one consecutive period of forty-nine years" (RSRH commentary to Vayikra 25:8).

Of his saintly wife, Henny a'h, Rabbi Mordechai Machlis relates, "What was Henny's yetzer harah? She would say: 'Thinking that it's me.' It's easy to get carried away by

success. There's a whole long list of people who are from today because of Henny. I would say that remembering that it wasn't her was a struggle she worked on. She always knew it was G-d. But she worked on internalizing that knowledge. She would say, 'Do you think I'm capable of having 14 children?'

"Henny worked hard at understanding that human excellence comes only from G-d. Humility is not a repudiation of accomplishment. Humility means, for example, that I understand that I play an instrument well, but it's a talent from G-d. In the end, Henny knew she

didn't do anything on her own - not having hundreds of weekly Shabbos guests, not raising a family, and not all of her acts of chessed." She understood it was all from Hashem (*Emunah with Love and Chicken Soup*, The Shaar Press, p.431-432).

No matter what year it is, this is a mentality and Torah hashkafa that we all must cultivate in our every day lives. While our successes - in all realms of life - may be many, it is only with the benevolence, kindness and grace of Avinu she'ba'Shomayim, our Compassionate Father in heaven, Who enables us to succeed.

Rav Soloveitchik on Behar: Brothers in Arms and Alms

Rabbi Aaron Goldscheider (Excerpted from *Torah United, Teachings on The Weekly Parashah From Rav Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, and The Chassidic Masters* (Ktav, 2023))

Two terms appear throughout the Torah to refer to a fellow Jew: *re'a* (רֵעַ) and *ach* (אָח). The first is a general term for one's fellow man or friend. The second most narrowly refers to a biological brother, and more broadly refers to kin.

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik firmly believed that the Torah's diction is precise. In passages concerning civil or criminal law, the Torah uses *re'a*. "You shall not covet your fellow's house (בֵּית רֵעֶךָ)" (Exodus 20:14) and "You shall not pull back your neighbor's landmark (גְּבוּל רֵעֶךָ)" (Deuteronomy 19:14). The Torah chooses a more impersonal term here because one must respect the rights, space, and property of one's fellow man.

It is specifically in contexts that are meant to evoke our fraternity that the Torah selects *ach* over *re'a*. In a loose sense the Jewish people are all related, but the use of the term is intended to remind us that we should treat each other like brothers. We are not only neighbors who happen to have bought houses on the same block and share a border, but close family. This powerful reminder is necessary, for example, in contexts of tzedakah, where the Torah consistently uses *ach*. In Parashat Behar, we read: "If your fellow (אָחִיךָ) becomes destitute and his hand falters beside you, you shall support him ..." (Leviticus 25:35).¹ To appeal to our neighborliness or acquaintanceship would not rouse us to do what needs doing. If charity begins at home, then our nuclear family ought to include more brothers and sisters.²

In addition, Parashat Behar has the line "that your brother (אָחִיךָ) might live with you" (Leviticus 25:36), which is used by Rabbi Akiva as a proof-text in the following case. If two men are stranded in the desert and

only one has a canteen with enough water for himself, what should he do? Ben Petura said better to share it so that neither has to see the other die of thirst. Rabbi Akiva opined that the owner should drink it and save his own life.³ Why? Because your brother should live with you. You need not help him at the cost of your own life. The Rav emphasized the choice of *ach* here. Although Rabbi Akiva says that you should save yourself, you should bear in mind that this person is like your brother and feel what he is going through.⁴

True Friends

The Rav and the renowned philanthropist Joseph Gruss were close confidants. Mr. Gruss became one of the greatest supporters of Yeshiva University and pledged to to build a campus in Yerushalayim. The pledge had a rider, however: the Rav would have to commit to teach there in its inaugural year. In the end, the Rav decided that he would not be able to honor such a commitment.⁵

Following this episode, the two ended up on a dais at a major dinner. When the Rav rose to speak, he prefaced his formal talk with some remarks on friendship. He said that in Biblical Hebrew two different words can refer to a friend. One is *re'a*, the word for one's fellow man, and the second is *yedid*. He noted that the first is noncommittal with regard to the long-term. The *re'a* can be a fair-weather friend, or, worse, can stab you in the back: "If a man shall act intentionally against his fellow (רֵעֶהוּ) to murder him with guile ..." (Exodus 21:14), the Torah says. The *yedid*, on the other hand, is a true friend whose friendship does not sour with age. "Joseph Gruss and I are true *yedidim*," declared the Rav.⁶

A More Perfect Society

In 1943, the Rav delivered his second *yahrzeit* lecture for his father, Rabbi Moshe Soloveichik. In the course of the lecture, he analyzed the difference between two terms for groups in the Torah that both appear in Numbers 10: *machaneh* and *edah*. The *machaneh*, he explained, is a shared encampment. People band together to protect themselves from the elements, animals, and other bellicose human beings. Animals do much the same, instinctively seeking safety in numbers. The *edah*, on the other hand, congregates not out of fear, anxiety, or weakness, but for a common constructive goal. “An *edah* is founded on a shared tradition and legacy with roots in antiquity and branches reaching forward to the end of days.”⁷ The Rav challenged those assembled not merely to unite in times of fear and uncertainty as a *machaneh*, but to make common cause and transform into a spiritual *edah*.

Perhaps these two insights of the Rav can be correlated. In a *machaneh*, the pragmatic arrangement means that individuals treat one another as a *re’u*, as partners and allies for a time. When the danger or shared need passes, the community disintegrates. In an *edah*, the members are so aligned that they care for one another like an *ach*, like family.

The Torah expects us to be an *edah* and act like family. We are enjoined to help our fellow if his animal is struggling under a burden (Exodus 23:5), in order to alleviate any pain the animal is experiencing. We need not head out to the country to observe this mitzvah, exclaimed the Rav, as it is even more applicable when a fellow Jew is struggling under a burden!⁸ The burden need not even be physical; an emotional burden can be much more crushing. The Torah wants us to help shoulder every kind of burden borne by those around us.⁹

Building an Edah

The Rav is probably best known for his unparalleled brilliance and complete dedication to teaching Torah. One of his defining life achievements, though, was his founding, organizing, and running of the Maimonides school in Boston.¹⁰ He spent a significant portion of his time and energy on building a school for his community, so that children could be educated in an Orthodox setting when private day school was not a given.¹¹ This pursuit certainly required that he set aside his learning for the sake of providing for others. The Rav himself considered this so important that prior to undergoing a serious surgery, he called his children to his side and said that he felt he had secured his place in the next world in the merit of founding

the school (and in the merit of studying Torah with his children and supporting a certain widow).¹²

The Rav’s sense of reaching all our brothers and sisters went considerably beyond his immediate communities in Boston or New York City. In the early 1970s, Rebbetzin Esther Jungreis was planning an innovative, powerful outreach event at Madison Square Garden. She sought the blessings of three leaders of the generation: Rabbi Yosef Eliyahu Henkin, Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, and the Rav. The first two offered their warm blessings, but the third began by declaring that he did not generally dispense blessings. Instead, he formulated his words as advice rather than a blessing: “Nobody will be able to stop you.” He then suggested that the open corridors of the large complex be lined with booths presenting various mitzvot—tefillin, mezuzah, Shabbat. Rebbetzin Jungreis loved the idea, and the Rav promised that his students would come help that night, which they did. Such was his sense of the extended *edah* that is the Jewish people.¹³

Exploring the Rav’s Insight

Rabbi Aaron Adler, a close student of the Rav, heard that the Rav was donating 60% of his money to charity. This seems halachically questionable, as the Talmud indicates an upper limit of a fifth.¹⁴ Rabbi Adler summoned the courage to ask the Rav if there was any truth to this rumor. The Rav wittily quoted a verse: “There is no righteous person on earth who does the right thing and never sins” (Ecclesiastes 7:20). He added, “I didn’t want to make Shlomo ha-Melech into a liar!” He then said that when he dies he will answer for the terrible charge of overspending on charity with a smile, entering the plea “guilty as charged”! He then explained that his expenses were minimal, and that he saw himself as an agent of God to help others in need.¹⁵

Chesed, the Rav believed, entails going to the extreme for others. This can be found in the word itself, which can’t always mean “lovingkindness” since incest is also described as chesed (Leviticus 20:17). Based on the Rambam, the Rav understood chesed to mean extreme behavior, whether for good or for ill.¹⁶

The Rav’s extraordinary generosity in looking out and after others partly came from his illustrious lineage. He told the following about his grandfather:

Rabbi Meir Berlin (1880–1949) once told me that he asked his grandfather, Rabbi Yechiel Michel ha-Levi Epstein (1829–1908), the author of the Aruch ha-Shulchan, what was the role of the rabbi. He answered, to decide questions of Jewish law. Rabbi Meir Berlin asked the same question of my grandfather Reb Chaim [Brisker]. He said that for guidance in Jewish law,

one may go to the dayan (rabbinical judge). However, the main role of the rabbi is to help the needy, protect the persecuted, defend the widow, and sustain orphans. In a word, it is acts of lovingkindness (gemilut chasadim). The truth is that the acts of Reb Chaim in these areas were fantastic. Stories abound about the illegitimate children whom he adopted, provided for, and sent to cheder. You all know how he helped the Bundist revolutionary on Yom Kippur. He saved his life.

There was no greater ba'al chesed (person who does kindnesses) than my grandfather, Reb Chaim Brisker. As a matter of fact, my father and my uncle insisted that the attribute of rav ha-chesed (master of benevolence) be inscribed on his tombstone. This was contrary to Reb Chaim's wishes in his testament that no titles be inscribed on his monument. They felt that this was the dominant feature of Reb Chaim's personality. In my opinion, as a chesed personality Reb Chaim towered above his intellectual personality.¹⁷

1. See also Deuteronomy 15:7.
2. Soloveitchik, Vision and Leadership, 155.
3. Bava Metzia 62a.
4. Soloveitchik, Family Redeemed, 146.
5. Mr. Gruss eventually built the campus anyway. It is known today as the Gruss Institute and houses a rabbinical seminary.
6. Adler, Seventy Conversations, 118–121. The word yedid appears only once in the Torah, in Deuteronomy 33:12. The noun might perhaps be a reduplicative of yad, the word for hand, since one hand clasps the other in a close friendship.
7. Rabbi Basil Herring, "Rav Soloveitchik on the Proper Response to Resurgent Anti-Semitism," <https://www.torahmusings.com/2020/01/rav-soloveitchik-on-the-proper-response-to-resurgent-anti-semitism/> (accessed August 8, 2021).

8. The Rav pointed out that this is the only injunction in the Torah that is expressed in a rhetorical question. Is it possible that a Jew would be so insensitive as not to help? (Chumash Mesoras Harav, 2:209).
9. Holzer, The Rav Thinking Aloud: Bereishis, 69–71. See Sefer ha-Chinuch, §80, which similarly says that compassion is at the root of this mitzvah, and "it goes without saying that not only are we obligated to have compassion on anyone in physical pain, but even on someone in distress over financial loss."
10. Even before the school was established, he would join his father before Pesach to buy matzah for the Jewish children then attending public school, given the lack of available alternative (S1 EP5, the Rav: A Conversation with Dr. Tovah Lichtenstein, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y0LE6TOHIRM>).
11. See Farber, American Orthodox Dreamer.
12. Rabbi Daniel Fridman, "Philosophy of the Rav: 25th Yahrzeit," yutorah.org/lectures/lecture.cfm/894636/rabbi-daniel-fridman/philosophy-of-the-rav-majesty-and-humility/ (accessed August 8, 2021).
13. Seltzer, The Rebbetzin, 63–65.
14. Ketubot 50a.
15. Adler, Seventy Conversations, 164–165. The Rav certainly was on firm halachic ground, as the Chafetz Chayim in his Ahavat Chesed (ch. 20) lists several exceptions to the "one-fifth" limitation. Among them is one who actively supports Torah study, for his reward is substantial. It is known that the Rav gave significant donations to his Maimonides school and to his uncle's yeshiva in Jerusalem. See Adler, Seventy Conversations, 163.
16. See Moreh Nevuchim, III:53.
17. Rakeffet-Rothkoff, The Rav, 1:193–194.

Our Intentions When Correcting and Criticizing

Rabbi Efrem Goldberg

ולא תונו איש את עמיתו ויראת מאלוקיך (25:18).
After introducing the prohibition of אוונאת דברים, the Torah adds ויראת מאלוקיך – that we must fear Hashem. Rashi, based on the Gemara, explains that a special warning to have יראת שמיים is needed in the context of prohibitions which depend upon a person's unexpressed intentions. In the case of אוונאת דברים, a person can walk into a store and inquire about the merchandise without any intention to buy, in violation of the prohibition of אוונאת דברים, but he can falsely claim that he really was considering making a purchase. Nobody other than Hashem knows whether or not this person truly considered buying merchandise, and so observing this mitzva requires יראת שמיים. It is only if the person realizes that Hashem knows his unspoken thoughts and intentions that he will abide by this command, for otherwise, he will

violate this prohibition and claim that he had actually intended to buy a product.

Rav Shaul Alter, the Gerrer Rosh Yeshiva, notes an additional application of this concept to the prohibition of אוונאת דברים. He tells the story related by Rav Shalom Schwadron, the "Maggid of Yerushalayim," of the time when the chazan in a shul made a mistake. It was Shabbos Rosh Chodesh, when the standard text of תכנת שבת, which is normally recited in musaf on Shabbos, is replaced by the special text for Rosh Chodesh, אתה יצרת. The chazan mistakenly began reciting תכנת שבת, and so somebody in the shul banged on the table and shouted, אתה יצרת to correct the chazan, who immediately transitioned to the proper text.

This incident, on the surface, appears perfectly normal and acceptable. However, few of the congregants knew

that the fellow who banged on the table to correct the chazan had a personal vendetta against him. These two had a history, and there were hard feelings and lots of resentment between them. Undoubtedly, the fellow who banged experienced a degree of satisfaction by being able to correct the chazan, by having the opportunity to publicly point out his mistake. And this feeling of satisfaction, the small amount of additional vigor with which he corrected the chazan, violated the command of אונאת דברים. If his intention was purely to correct the mistake, so that the tefila would be recited properly, then he would have done nothing wrong, and to the contrary, he would have been credited with a mitzva. But since he intended also to cause the chazan embarrassment, relishing the opportunity to point out his mistake, he is guilty of

transgressing a Torah prohibition.

Rav Shaul Alter observes that this, too, is included in the admonition, ויראת מאלוקיך. Whenever we correct somebody, or offer criticism, the legitimacy of our words depends on our unspoken thoughts and intentions. If we are driven solely by a sincere desire to help the other person, then correcting or criticizing fulfills a mitzva. But if our motivation includes a desire to feel superior, to feel smarter or better than that individual, or to cause him to feel embarrassed, then we violate the prohibition of אונאת דברים. It requires a great deal of שמיים, genuine fear of God, to know when to criticize and when to keep silent, whether we offer the criticism out of sincere motives or for the purpose of putting the other person down.

The Torah's Revolutionary Economic System

Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald

The Torah, in Leviticus 25:2, proclaims: וְשָׁבְתָה הָאֲרֶץ וְשָׁבַת לַהֹשֵׁם G-d. Just as Jews must have Shabbat, a day of rest, so must the land have its rest—the Sabbatical year known as שְׁמִטָּה—shemita. Farmers may work the land for six years, but in the seventh year the land is to lie fallow and be “released” from cultivation.

The Torah makes it clear that, contrary to popular perception, the land is not the absolute possession of the human “landowner,” but rather belongs to G-d. The mortal “landowner” merely holds the land in trust for G-d’s purposes. This idea was so revolutionary, that the ancient peoples who lived alongside the Jews and saw them practice the laws of shemita, had trouble comprehending their behavior. In fact, the Roman historian, Tacitus, (c. 56 CE-c. 120) attributed the practice of shemita to laziness on the part of the Jews.

During the Sabbatical year, the land was devoted to G-d, by being placed at the service of the poor and the animals. During that year, as the land lay fallow, all fields were open to the public, who were entitled to come and take food from whatever grew wildly for their daily needs. Furthermore, in Deuteronomy 31:12, we learn that the seventh year was to be set aside as a time for national educational enrichment, and that all Jews, men, women, and children, were to be exposed to the teachings and duties of the Torah. In his commentary on the Pentateuch, (The Pentateuch and Haftorahs, Soncino, p. 531), Rabbi Joseph Hertz notes that while the leaders of most ancient

peoples worked diligently to keep knowledge away from the masses, it was “the glory of Moses” that he made Torah knowledge universally available to all the Jews, young and old alike.

Parashat Behar also introduces the concept of the Jubilee, known in Hebrew as יוֹבֵל—Yovel. In the fiftieth year, the year after the seventh year of the seventh Sabbatical cycle, all land that had been sold by its original tribal landowner, reverted back to the original tribal owners. Hebrew servants and their families were emancipated, and almost all property, returned to the original owners. This system assured that no family or tribe was to be locked into perpetual poverty, and that, at least, every fifty years the downtrodden were able to regain their family real estate holdings and start rebuilding their lives, without the terrible burdens of old debts. The American social philosopher Henry George is quoted as saying, “It is not the protection of property, but the protection of humanity, that is the aim of the Mosaic code.”

A law that is often overlooked, is the regulation regarding the sale of individual homes. All individually-owned homes that had been sold during the previous years were also returned to their original owners in the Jubilee year, with the exception of those homes built within walled cities. This, of course, significantly limited the extent of urban development that could take place on the land.

For those of us who live in capitalistic economic systems, the Torah’s laws regarding land and dwellings, must seem strange at best, or foolhardy, at worst.

Clearly, the Torah does not support the practices of pure capitalism. Neither does the Torah advocate pure socialism, where wealth is divided equally by all. Wealth is certainly not regarded as sinful in the Torah's eyes. The Torah system is, in essence, a modified economic system that makes certain that the poor can be resuscitated and restored to a point where they can have a chance to regain their dignity.

Although it might be speculative, it seems to me, that while the Torah expresses the centrality of caring for the needy, it also articulates a rather strong anti-urban attitude. Those of us who live in brutally overpopulated cities, and dwell in buildings that are essentially stacked boxes of apartments, know well the price that is paid for this mass warehousing of humanity, resulting in a lack of fellowship, neighborliness and friendliness. It may very well be that human beings do not have the capacity for the vast numbers of social and business relationships that are foisted upon them today, so that all relationships quickly become shallow, and hardly any of them are meaningful. Because of over-urbanization and over-stimulation, not to mention the ubiquity of social media, everything becomes superficial.

The Torah, in effect, declares, don't build high-rise dwellings with 30 apartments on a floor. Human beings need to live in manageable "herds," even the animals know that. It is not unusual for a city dweller to learn that a next-door neighbor had passed away several months earlier. This kind of stockpiling of bodies may be considered "dwelling"

together, but it certainly is not "living" together.

Because of the Torah's rules mandating restricted urbanization, there will inevitably be more open space. Perhaps the Torah is also encouraging us regarding the importance for every person to have a garden—a real, personal agricultural experience. People simply need to feel a connection to the earth, to appreciate the role of the farmer, to behold the beauty of flowers blossoming, to feel a connection to nature, and, in that way, connect more profoundly with G-d.

As our already frenetically-paced lifestyle becomes increasingly frenetic, increasingly compartmentalized, increasingly lonely, we see more people losing their humanity, becoming increasingly unsociable, and increasingly violent.

Although the economic and social systems of parashat Behar are not readily replicable today, this parasha surely serves as a most effective reminder about how careful we must be not to allow our present systems to reduce us as human beings. We need to take the time to stop, and smell the roses. We need to stop, to look our spouses and our children in the face, and have meaningful conversations with them. We need to kneel down more often, to help the child who cannot stand tall on his/her own. We need to regenerate our minds and our hearts by setting aside sacred time for study.

That is the fascinating and revolutionary message of parashat Behar. Let's go for it!.

Worthy or Not, We Are Ready for Redemption

Rabbi Dr. Kenneth Brander

Ever since October 7th, we have all been on the lookout for heroes. In the face of tragedy and villainy, we seek out those who can inspire us to carry on, to see the best in humanity, in ourselves that enables us to move towards redemption. The brave soldiers and civilians who fought with every breath to save innocents during the attack. The thousands of Israelis serving on the frontlines, along with Jews from around the world who have put themselves in harm's way to show support for our homeland. Those on the home front who dropped everything to identify bodies, house the displaced, embrace the families of the hostages and the reservists, tend the fields, attend the funerals, care for the wounded, and so much more. Each person who has done their part has left a mark on all of us, strengthening us and

encouraging us that a better tomorrow will follow these dark days. Rav Chaim Attar, the Or ha-Hayyim, in his commentary on this week's parsha, unearths a reference to the righteous people who hasten the redemption. The Torah (Vayikra 25:25-28) describes a situation in which a landowner falls on hard times, and is forced to sell off his inherited portion of land. Under these circumstances, a relative is charged to be a 'redeemer' – to purchase the field in order to keep the land within the family. But if no redeeming relative is available or wishes to act in that role, then the land may indeed be sold to another person – but only until the Jubilee year, at which point it is returned to the original owner. For R. Chaim Attar, this passage is not merely a directive for those who face financial difficulty; rather, it is to be read metaphorically,

offering “a great insight for the dwellers of the earth.” The portion of real estate is, in the metaphor, the land of Israel centered in Jerusalem, and the financially disadvantaged Jew is, in fact, the spiritually impoverished Jewish people, who are subjected to exile and loss of their freedom and sacred land. In such a moment, it is the responsibility of the ‘redeemers’ – namely, the righteous of each generation who are themselves ‘relatives’ of God – to bring about redemption through their leadership and actions that impact the lives of our nation.

Moreover, says R. Chaim Attar, even if no redeemer from the righteous rises up, the very suffering of the Jewish people shall be seen by God, and eventually the Jubilee, the end date for the exile, will arrive, even without the Jewish people having accrued sufficient merit. There are thus two pathways to ultimate redemption: the opportunity seized by the righteous to redeem the people, and the eventual deadline to end our suffering. As we look around us, we can say with certainty that the time for redemption has come. Countless righteous people, of every age, stripe, and religious affiliation, have accrued for our people unimaginable merit through their unending care for the

welfare of their brethren. It is important to remember that righteous people are not defined only as those who formally observe the 613 commandments. It is those who are willing to put their personal wants to the side and focus on the welfare / redemption of the people. Last week, I heard Avidan Beit Yaakov speak on Channel 12 prior to the burial of his son Roi, who fell in a friendly-fire incident in Gaza. Avidan stated “the soldiers in the tank [who fired on the building where his son was located] are tzadikim – righteous people. This happens in war, and I have no anger towards them ... I hug them and their commanders need to hug them; after the war is over and they have finished their mission – not before – they are invited to come to our home for us to give them hugs with no questions asked.” Our suffering in these past few months, when taken along with all the suffering of our people in its millennia of exile, should certainly be enough by now as well. Whatever the pathway, whether God considers us worthy or not, we are ready for ultimate redemption, to embrace “the day after,” when our people will be united and our wounds will be healed. This cannot come fast enough. In the meantime, we will continue to look for, and strive to be, heroes.

The Mitzvah of Peah and the Yamim Tovim

Rabbi Immanuel Bernstein

אֶל הָאָרֶץ יָ אֲשֶׁר אָנִי נֹתֵן לָכֶם וְשַׁבְּתָהּ הָאָרֶץ יָ שְׁבֹתָ לָהּ י תְּבֹאוּךְ

When you come to the land that I give you, the land shall rest as a Shabbos for Hashem (25:2)

Commenting on this pasuk, the Toras Kohanim (Perek 1, siman 2) writes:
In the same way as the seventh day of the week is referred to as “a Shabbos for Hashem,” so, too, the seventh year is referred to as “a Shabbos for Hashem.”

Anyone who reads the Chumash will likewise notice that the Torah uses the same term when referring to both Shabbos and Shemitah. Clearly, the intent of the Toras Kohanim is to indicate that there is a special connection between these two times. What is the nature of this connection?

The Meshech Chochmah explains. Both the Shemitah and the Yovel years involve a mitzvah to cease working the land. However, the nature of the mitzvah on these two occasions differs, and in fact parallels a fundamental difference between the days of Shabbos and Yom Tov.

Shabbos and Yom Tov / Shemitah and Yovel

The Gemara (Beitzah 17a) notes that whereas both

Shabbos and Yom Tov are holy days, the means through which those days are determined and established differs. Whereas the day of Shabbos is determined solely by Hashem, with Bnei Yisrael assuming the role of receiving the day, Yom Tov is determined by Bnei Yisrael, as represented by the Beis Din. By them choosing which day to sanctify as Rosh Chodesh, this then determines which day the Yom Tov which falls within that month will be.¹

It is most interesting to note that the very same distinction exists within the halachos of Shemitah and Yovel. Like Shabbos, the Shemitah year attains its status “automatically,” i.e. directly from the Torah. In contrast, the status of the Yovel year needs to be conferred upon it by the Beis Din. This requirement is stated in pasuk 10: “וְקִדְשְׁתֶּם אֶת שְׁנַת הַחֲמִישִׁים שָׁנָה – *You shall sanctify the fiftieth year,*” and parallels the Torah’s instructions to the Beis Din regarding the establishment of Yom Tov, (Vayikra 23:7) “מִקְרָא קֹדֶשׁ יִהְיֶה לָכֶם – *It shall be a holy calling for you.*”

Indeed, this distinction is further reflected in the respective halachos of these two years. The prohibitions of Shemitah exist independently of Bnei Yisrael’s actions. Even if the people did not count the years leading up to

the seventh year it is still forbidden to work the land; and even if they fenced in their fields and denied others access to them, the produce of that year is nonetheless hefker – ownerless.² In contrast to this, the prohibitions against working the land in the Yovel year are a function of the Beis Din sanctifying and establishing it as such. Indeed, the Gemara³ states that if the other mitzvos of the Yovel year – sounding the shofar on Yom Kippur, releasing servants and returning fields to their original owners – were not fulfilled, the prohibition against working the land would not apply!

“Your produce” and “Its Produce”

This basic distinction is further reflected in a nuanced reading of the respective pesukim outlines the prohibitions for these two years:

- With regards to the Shemitah year, the Torah states, “אֶת סְפִיחַ קְצִירְךָ לֹא תִקְצֹר וְאֶת עֲנַבִּי נְזִירְךָ לֹא תִבְצֹר” – The growth of your harvest you shall not reap and the grapes of your separation you shall not pick.”
- With regards to the Yovel year it states, “וְלֹא תִקְצְרוּ” וְלֹא תִבְצְרוּ אֶת – נְזִירְךָ Youshallnotharvestits growth and you shall not pick its grapes.”

We note that with regards to the Shemitah year, the Torah refers to “Your harvest” and “your separation,” while with regards to the Yovel year the reference is to

“its growth” and “its separation.” This shift in phraseology reflects the difference between these two years. The prohibition of Shemitah applies to “your” produce, i.e., under all circumstances, simply by virtue of the fact that you own it. In contrast, the prohibition of Yovel applies to “its” produce, with the term “it” referring to the Yovel year. In other words, the prohibition against harvesting during the Yovel year is dependent on that produce being considered “its produce”, i.e. produced that pertains to the year that was sanctified and “activated” as Yovel.

1. The Gemara elsewhere (Berachos 49a) notes that is for this reason the bracha for Shabbos concludes “Blessed are You Hashem, Who sanctifies the Shabbos (מְקַדֵּשׁ הַשַּׁבָּת),” while the bracha for Yom Tov concludes “Blessed are You Hashem, Who sanctifies Yisrael and the Festive Seasons (מְקַדֵּשׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל וְהַיּוֹמִים).” Namely, whereas with regards to Shabbos, its sanctity comes directly from Hashem, when it comes to Yom Tov, Hashem sanctifies Yisrael – who then sanctify the seasons.
2. The point being emphasized here is that when the Torah commands that Shemitah produce be “abandoned”, i.e. treated as hefker (see Shemos 23:11), this is not to be understood as the Torah commanding the owner of the produce to declare it hefker, rather, the Torah declares it hefker! The Meshech Chochmah refers us further to the teshuvos of the Maharit (1:42) where this question is discussed at length.
3. Rosh Hashanah 9b, see Rambam Hilchos Shemitah 9:13.

Haftarat Behar: Hope: A Divine Imperative

Dr. Barry L. Eichler (From *From Within the Tent: The Haftarah, Essays on the Weekly Haftarah from the Rabbis and Professors of Yeshiva University*, YU Press, 2011)

This haftarah is selected from one of the chapters of consolation found in the book of Yirmiyahu. The first verses of this chapter (32:1–5) detail the dire personal and national circumstances in which Yirmiyahu and the people of Yehudah found themselves when Yirmiyahu received the prophetic message recorded in this chapter. The prophecy is dated to the tenth year of King Tzidkiyahu, corresponding to the eighteenth year of Nevuchadnezzar, the King of Babylon, at the time when the Babylonian army was besieging Jerusalem. Yirmiyahu himself was under personal siege, confined to the royal prison for having prophesied that God would deliver Tzidkiyahu and Jerusalem into the hands of the Babylonian king.

The prophetic portion begins with God announcing to Yirmiyahu that his cousin, Chanamel, will be coming to the prison compound to request that Yirmiyahu buy his parcel of land in the city of Anatot, and thus redeem the ancestral

property to which Yirmiyahu had the right of succession. The prophetic portion may then be divided into three sections: the acquisition of the property (32:9–11); the disposition of the deed of purchase (32:12–15); and Yirmiyahu’s prayer to God and the opening verse of the Divine response (32:16–27). Let us briefly discuss these three sections before exploring the relationship of the prophetic portion to the Torah reading.

1. The acquisition of the property (32:9–11):

At this time there was no coinage, and hence the purchase price, paid in silver, had to be weighed out on a balance in the presence of the seller. The Hebrew text describes the purchase price as “seven shekels and ten” which may be understood either as totaling 17 shekels, or else as totaling 7 ½ shekels of silver. The ambiguity is due to the absence of a designated measure of weight associated with the number 10. The number may refer back to the shekel (hence 7 + 10 = 17 shekels). The difficulty with this interpretation,

however, is not only the order of the numerals, since the larger number would have been expected to be in the initial position (“10 shekels and 7”) but also by the need to explain the use of the more cumbersome phraseology of 7 + 10 rather than the use of the numeral 17. Thus other commentators suggest that the numeral 10 refers not to the shekel but to the subdivision of the shekel, namely the geirah. From Shemot 30:13, we learn that a shekel was the equivalent of 20 geirahs. Hence, 10 geirahs would equal half of a shekel. In either case, the acquisition of real estate was legally accomplished by giving the full purchase price in weighed silver to the seller. Yirmiyahu then drew up a deed of purchase, sealed it, had it witnessed, and reweighed the silver in the presence of the witnesses.

2. The disposition of the deed of purchase (32:12–15):

The written deed contained two texts – the “hidden” text which contained the detailed account of the transaction, and the “open” text which was probably an abbreviated account of the transaction. Ancient Near Eastern practice was to provide a “hidden” account of the transaction and a duplicate account which was easily accessible. In cuneiform practice, the inner clay tablet recording the transaction was hidden by an outer layer of clay containing a second complete or abbreviated record of the transaction, (often referred to as an “envelope”) which was exposed for all to see. In societies using leather scrolls, the detailed record of the transaction was rolled and tied up and hence hidden from view, while the scroll contained a second, often abbreviated, record which was left untied and open for all to see. The purpose of the double writing was to prevent the record from being corrupted by forgery. Should a claim of forgery or other malfeasance be charged by one of the parties, the “hidden” text would be opened by the court, exposing any type of corruption to the “open” text. Yirmiyahu gave the deed of purchase to his attendant, Baruch ben Neriah, in the presence of Chanamel, the witnesses, and all the Judeans sitting in the prison compound. Yirmiyahu then commanded Baruch to place the deed of purchase in an earthen vessel in order to preserve it for a long period of time. The efficacy of this practice has been documented from the ancient scrolls recovered from earthen jars found in caves, located in the Judean desert and in the area of the Dead Sea. Yirmiyahu then explained his charge to Baruch in the presence of all assembled by stating God’s promise of hope: “For thus said the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel: ‘Houses, fields and vineyards shall again be purchased in this land.’”

3. Yirmiyahu’s prayer and God’s response (32:16–27):

The role of the Biblical prophet is not only that of the Divine messenger, but also that of the intercessor, standing in the breach, trying desperately to avert the divine wrath from overwhelming the land and his people (Yechezkel 22:30–31). Avraham, Moshe, Shmuel, and Yechezkel are paradigms of such prophets. Hence, prophetic prayer is very often one of intercession on behalf of the people. Yirmiyahu’s prayer in this haftarah, however, is a very different type of prayer, one that is wholly personal and intimate. It is the prayer of the anguished man of faith who does not hesitate to fulfill the Divine command, who deeply believes that “nothing is too wondrous” for the Creator of heaven and earth, and yet, when confronted with the reality of the Babylonian siege-mounds raised against the city to storm it, and witnessing the famine-stricken and pestilence-plagued city at the mercy of the attacking enemy, he dares to falter in his faith and question: How can it be that You commanded me to purchase the land for money and call in witnesses? Note God’s response has no hint of reproach for this wavering of faith. The Divine response begins with a reaffirmation of Yirmiyahu’s deep belief: “Behold I am the Lord, the God of all flesh. Is anything too wondrous for Me?” And the response ends with a Divine promise that “fields shall be purchased and deeds written and sealed, and witnesses called in the land of Benjamin and in the environs of Jerusalem and in the towns of Judah ... For I will restore their fortunes – declares the Lord.”

Indeed, this haftarah declares that hope is a Divine imperative which throughout Jewish history has served to sustain and reinforce our deep faith in God’s ultimate goodness, even as we stand at the brink of despair. This faith is rooted in God’s everlasting covenant that we shall be His people and He shall be our God, in the steadfast belief that He will not turn away from us and that He will treat us graciously, and in the promise that He will put in our hearts reverence for Him so that He may delight in treating us graciously (Yirmiyahu 32:36–44).

The obvious relationship between the prophetic portion and the Torah reading is the commandment, found in this week’s parashah, to redeem the property of one’s kinsman: “If your brother is in straits and has to sell part of his holdings, his closest relative able to redeem shall come forth and redeem what his brother has sold (Vayikra 25:25).” Yirmiyahu is acting in his capacity as Chanamel’s nearest redeemer, thus exemplifying the fulfillment of this Biblical commandment. But the connection is even more

profound. The theme of Parashat Behar centers on the Israelites' relationship to the Land of Israel. The laws of the sabbatical and jubilee years decree periods of complete rest for the land, during which its owners must relinquish all signs of ownership over the land. These laws underscore the premise that the land ultimately belongs to God who 'leases' the land to the Israelites. In the jubilee year, every Israelite is to return to his ancestral property and again be united with the portion of land God had graciously allotted to his family. This 'leased' land must be retained by the Israelites and may not be alienated. The bond between the Land of Israel and the people of Israel must never be forgotten. This realization strengthens our love of the land and our commitment to dwell therein. Nevertheless, God's ultimate ownership of the land must also never be forgotten. The following parashah, Bechukotai, warns us about the dire consequences for failing to observe the sabbatical and jubilee years – namely, exile and desolation – so that the land shall rest and make up for its Sabbath years. It is against this background that the haftarah unfolds. Yirmiyahu's love of the land, his commitment to own property in the Land of Israel even as he witnessed the ensuing destruction, exile, and loss of national sovereignty, and his deep rooted faith in God's promise to restore the covenant and His special relationship with His people and His land, have given us the strength to hope for a better future even in the darkest of hours.