

OHRNET

SHABBAT PARSHAT BEHAR • 13 IYAR 5782 14 MAY 2022 • VOL 29 NO. 28
THIS WEEK IS EMOR OUTSIDE ISRAEL - SAVE THIS FOR NEXT SHABBAT

PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

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 Hashem'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 lands 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 am a doctor" or "I am an accountant" or "I am a rabbi."

There is a fundamental mistake here. What we do is not what we are.

In our society we have confused what we do with who we are. The underlying belief revealed here is that the more I work the more I become myself. Violation of the laws of Shemita comes from a belief that the more I work, the more money will I make, and the more I make, the more I am the master of my own world.

When a person is sent into exile, all the familiar comforting symbols of his success are taken away from him. He realizes that what he does is not who he is. Both his survival and his identity are gifts from Hashem. The insecurity of exile brings a person face to face with his total dependence on Hashem.

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.

Q & A

Questions

1. Why does the Torah specify that the laws of shemita were taught on Har Sinai?
2. If one possesses shemita food after it is no longer available in the field, what must he do with it?
3. The Torah commands, "You shall sanctify the fiftieth year." How is this done?
4. Which two "returns" are announced by the shofar during yovel?
5. From where does the yovel year get its name?
6. What prohibitions are derived from the verse "v'lo tonu ish et amit" - a person shall not afflict his fellow?
7. What is the punishment for neglecting the laws of shemita?
8. If shemita is observed properly, how long is the crop of the sixth year guaranteed to last?
9. After selling an ancestral field, when can one redeem it?
10. Under what circumstance may one sell ancestral land?
11. If a home in a walled city is sold, when can it be redeemed?
12. What does the word "days" mean in this week's Parsha?
13. What is considered a walled city?
14. What is the definition of a "ger toshav"?
15. To what is one who leaves Eretz Yisrael compared?
16. Why does Rashi mention the plague of the firstborn in this week's Parsha?
17. List three prohibitions which demonstrate the dignity with which one must treat a Jewish indentured servant.
18. Who supports the family of the Jewish indentured servant during his years of servitude?
19. If a Jew is sold as a servant to a non-Jew, does he go free after six years?
20. Where is it permitted to prostrate oneself on a stone floor?

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

Answers

1. 25:1 - To teach us that just as Shemitta was taught in detail on Har Sinai, so too, all the mitzvot were taught in detail on Har Sinai.
2. 25:7 - Remove it from his property and declare it ownerless.
3. 25:10 - At the beginning of the year the Beit Din declares, "This year is kadosh (sanctified)."
4. 25:10 - The return of the land to its original owner, and the "return" (freedom) of the slave from slavery.
5. 25:10 - From the sounding of the shofar. A ram's horn is called a yovel.
6. 25:17 - One may not intentionally hurt people's feelings, nor give bad advice while secretly intending to reap benefit.
7. 25:18 - Exile.
8. 25:21,22 - From Nissan of the sixth year until Sukkot of the ninth year.
9. 25:24 - After two years following the sale, until yovel. At the beginning of yovel it returns to the family automatically.
10. 25:25 - Only if one becomes impoverished.
11. 25:29 - Only within the first year after the sale. Afterwards, even in yovel, it does not return.
12. 25:29 - The days of an entire year.
13. 25:29 - A city that has been surrounded by a wall since the time of Yehoshua.
14. 25:35 - A non-Jew who lives in Eretz Yisrael and accepts upon himself not to worship idols.
15. 25:38 - To one who worships idols.
16. 25:38 - The prohibition against taking interest is accompanied by the phrase, "I am the L-rd your G-d who took you out of Egypt." Rashi explains that just as Hashem discerned in Egypt between those who were firstborn and those who were not, so too will Hashem discern and punish those who lend with interest, pretending they are acting on behalf of others.
17. 25:39-43 -
 1. Do not make him perform humiliating tasks.
 2. Do not sell him publicly.
 3. Do not make him perform unnecessary jobs.
18. 25:41 - His master.
19. 25:54 - No. If he is not redeemed with money, he must wait until the yovel to go free.
20. 26:1 - In the Mikdash.

COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

THE AMIDAH (PART 10) — BLESSING OF REDEMPTION

“Prayer is not a miracle. It is a tool, man’s paintbrush in the art of life. Prayer is man’s weapon to defend himself in the struggle of life. It is a reality. A fact of life.”

(Rabbi Avrohom Chaim Feuer)

The seventh blessing reads: “Behold our affliction, take up our grievance, and redeem us speedily for Your Name’s sake, for You are a powerful redeemer. Blessed are You, Hashem, Redeemer of Israel.”

Once we have accepted upon ourselves to purify ourselves, and have asked Hashem to forgive us, we are now able to entreat Him to take us out of exile. The opening words of our blessing are paraphrased from *Tehillim* (25:18), which states, “Look upon my affliction and my toil.” Now, we are asking Hashem to see how weak we are, and how much we are suffering at the hands of others. We are telling Hashem, and perhaps, ourselves, that we, the Jewish nation, cannot ensure our survival. Only He can. That is why we ask Him to fight against our enemies. Rabbi Avraham ibn Ezra (1090-1165) was one of the most prominent and illustrious scholars from Spain. He was truly multifaceted, publishing one of the most significant commentaries on the Torah in his era. He also wrote commentaries on *Nevi'im* (Prophets) and *Ketuvim* (Writings). He authored works on Hebrew grammar, mathematics,

astronomy and astrology. He was also an accomplished poet, writing many beautiful poems. In recognition of his enormous contribution to science, a crater on the moon — Abenezra — was named after him. In his commentary on *Tehillim*, the Ibn Ezra explains that “my affliction and my toil” refers to King David’s battle against the Evil Inclination. He is describing his unceasing struggle to prevent the Evil Inclination from dragging him into sin. Rabbi Aharon Kotler was the legendary founder of the famed Beth Medrash Govoha in

Lakewood, New Jersey, and the undisputed spiritual leader of the Yeshiva world in America at the time. He points out that King David is one of only three people who are granted the title of *gever*, man, in Tanach. Rabbi Kotler explains that King David earned such a remarkable title because no one fought the Evil Inclination as King David did. Just as the Evil Inclination never stops trying to trip us up, so, too, King David never gave up his battle against it.

Rabbi Baruch from Rika was still running around trying to raise money for poor families when in his eighties. His friends did their best to try getting him to slow down. But he told them, “My dear friends, you are not first to tell me to take it easy. The Evil Inclination has been telling me that for a long time! And I always told him, ‘You are much older than I am, and yet you have not retired. When you give up doing your work, I’ll give up doing mine!’”

The second part of the blessing is based on a verse in *Mishlei* (22:23), “Hashem will take up their grievances.” The commentaries explain that Hashem protects the weak against the powerful and the wealthy. In our blessing, we depict the Jewish nation as being persecuted and tormented. We anticipate the moment when Hashem will redeem us from this interminable exile. But, in the meantime, we entreat Hashem to “redeem us speedily” from the dangers and oppression that befall His Chosen nation every single day.

There is a delightful tale told about a Chassid who went to his Rebbe to ask for advice about a matter that greatly disturbed him. The Rebbe took both of his hands in his own, and while gently squeezing them he told him in Yiddish that Hashem would help — “*G-t von helfen.*” The Chassid left the Rebbe’s

room feeling very relieved. Just outside the door, the Rebbe's young son was playing, and when he saw the Chassid, he asked him what his father had told him that caused him to look so happy. The Chassid told him that the Rebbe promised him that Hashem would help. The child looked at the Chassid and asked him if his father had told him *when* Hashem would help. The Chassid seemed confused and answered in the negative. So, the Rebbe's young son told the Chassid to go back to his father to ask what he was supposed to do until Hashem helps him. The Chassid proceeded to do so, and when he came out again, the Rebbe's son asked him what his father had said. The Chassid answered that the Rebbe told him that until Hashem helped... Hashem would help!

Our blessing concludes with the words, "Redeemer of Israel." The word redeemer is written in the present because, as we await the long anticipated redemption, Hashem is constantly protecting us from the virulent hatred and derision from the other nations of the world.

Numbers are always extremely significant in Judaism and contain profound lessons. Our blessing is the seventh blessing in the *Amidah*. The Maharal (*Ner Mitzvah*) writes that the number seven represents nature and the natural cycle. For example, there are seven days in the week because Hashem created the world in seven days. The blessing for redemption being the seventh blessing teaches that however difficult any era might be, the redemption will certainly take place. It has been built into the natural cycle of world history. And, until it happens, may it be very, very soon, Hashem will always watch over us. It is fascinating to note that in our blessing we do not ask Hashem to bless us with tranquil lives, devoid of any difficulties or hardships. However perfect such a life may sound, our Sages teach that it would offer less opportunity for personal growth. The difficulties and imperfections that we encounter in life – on both an individual and national scale – help us develop and flourish in becoming productive members of the Jewish nation.

To be continued...

PARSHA OVERVIEW

The Torah prohibits normal farming of the Land of Israel every seven years. This "Shabbat for the land" is called "Shemitta." After every seventh Shemitta, the fiftieth year, Yovel ("Jubilee") is announced with the sound of the shofar on Yom Kippur. This was also a year for the land to lie fallow. Hashem promises to provide a bumper crop prior to the Shemitta 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.

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

The Year of Slipping Away (Part 1/2)

The Torah commands that every seventh year be declared a Sabbatical Year, during which the Holy Land must be left fallow, and all loans are to be considered remitted. This year – 5782 – is a Sabbatical Year, so I thought it would be appropriate to discuss two Hebrew terms used to refer to the Sabbatical Year: *Shemittah* and *Sheviit*. The first essay focuses on the term *Shemittah* (“slipping away”) and explores various Hebrew words which appear to be synonymous with that term. The second essay focuses on the term *Sheviit* (“the seventh one”) and expounds on other related Hebrew expressions whose etymologies seem to be connected to the root of that word.

In five instances, the Book of Deuteronomy refers to the Sabbatical Year as *Shemittah* (Deut. 15:1–2, 15:9, 31:10). This noun is derived from the trilateral root SHIN-MEM-TET, which also gives us a verb that means “to slip away.” Indeed, the Torah uses forms of this verb when discussing the laws of *Shemittah*: “and six years shall you sow your land and you shall gather its produce, and [in] the seventh [year], you shall ‘slip it away’ (*tishmitenah*) and abandon it...” (Ex. 23:10-11). As Rashi explains, this passage refers to the requirement that one refrain from working the land during the Sabbatical Year. Elsewhere, the Torah speaks about a lender allowing all loans due to him to “slip away” (*shamot, tashmet*) during the *Shemittah* year (see Deut. 15:2–3). Thus, both the agricultural and financial laws regarding the Sabbatical Year are associated with the term *Shemittah*.

Although in the colloquial vernacular, many people nowadays continue to use the Biblical term *Shemittah* in reference to the Sabbatical Year, in the Babylonian Talmud that term is actually fairly rare and only appears a few times outside of citing the above-mentioned Biblical verses (*Nazir* 8b, *Sotah* 41a, *Gittin* 36a, *Bava Metzia* 30b, 48b, *Sanhedrin* 32a, *Shevuot* 44b, and several other places).

How does the literal meaning of “slipping off” relate back to laws of the Sabbatical Year? To better

understand this, we will visit several other cases which use words derived from the same trilateral root at *shemittah* and infer from them a more precise definition of this root.

When Uzza sent forth his hand to support the Holy Ark as it was being transported on cattle, he did so because the beasts *shamat* the holy object (II Sam. 6:6, I Chron. 13:9). Rabbi Yonah Ibn Janach (in *Sefer HaShorashim*) explains that this means that the sheer weight of the ark was causing the animals’ joints to burst, and this would have led to the ark falling off (“slipping off”) the wagon, had the animals actually collapsed. Similarly, when Jehu killed Jezebel by way of defenestration (i.e., throwing her out the window), the verb used by the Bible to denote this gruesome action is a cognate of *shemittah* (II Kings 9:33), with Radak (there) and Ibn Ezra (Deut. 15:1) commenting that in this context the term means “to let something go so that it will fall.”

From these examples, it seems that the core denotation of *shemittah* is leaving something to its own devices, which will invariably cause it to fall or slip out of place. In that sense, *shemittah* denotes both “forsaking” something and the “falling/slipping” that results from it being forsaken. As a result, we may explain that by not working one’s fields during the Sabbatical Year as stipulated by the Torah, one essentially loosens their grip on their property (“forsaking”) and thus figuratively allows it to “slip away” from their control/ownership in a free-for-all freefall. Similarly, we can explain that when a lender forgoes collecting the debts he is owed (“forsaking”), those monies are no longer in his hand, but rather “slip away” from his proverbial grasp.

In discussing the case of the accidental killer who must flee to a City of Refuge, the Bible uses the example of somebody who was chopping wood in the forest and his hand “slipped” out of place, causing the metal part of the hammer or a piece of wood to fling outwards and kill somebody (Deut. 19:5). In explaining that the wood-chopper’s hand “slipped,” Rashi echoes the verbiage of the Mishnah

(*Makkot* 2:1) in using a cognate of the word *Shemittah* (see also Rashi to II Sam. 6:6, who connects the usage of *shemittah* here to its appearance in the story of Uzza, mentioned above). In this case, the “slipping” is not necessarily the result of anything being “forsaken,” but seems to be a borrowed usage.

Additionally, when the Talmud (*Chullin* 57a) discusses whether an animal/bird with a dislocated shoulder or thigh is considered moribund (*tereifah*), it uses the term *shmutat* to denote that dislocation, as the affected bone is understood to have “slipped out” of place. This too is unrelated to “forsaking,” *per se*, but the “dislocation” aspect shares the same result as something “slipping away.”

Rashi extends the semantic range of *shemittah* to refer to something “slipping away” in the sense of “escaping” a specific danger and/or “fleeing” from trouble (see Rashi to Gen. 19:17, Iyov 1:15). Another expanded meaning of *shemittah* in rabbinic parlance is “an omission.” This term appears in the context of a scribe writing a Torah scroll while “skipping” (*hishmit*) a given letter, or one reading from the Torah Scroll while “skipping” (*hishmit*) over a given verse (*Megillah* 18b). In many Hebrew books a list of addenda/errata appears at the end under the title *hashmatot* (omissions).

The Torah mandates that a widow whose husband died without children (known as a *yevamah*) must either marry her deceased husband’s brother (*yibbum*, i.e., the Levirate marriage) or must perform the *chalitzah* ceremony, whereby she removes her brother-in-law’s shoe from upon his foot (Deut. 25:9). Before taking either of these courses of action, the *yevamah* is forbidden from marrying anybody else besides one of her deceased husband’s brothers. As the Talmud puts it, the *yevamah*’s license to marry somebody else is commensurate with the *shemittah* (“slipping off”) of most of the heel (*Yevamos* 102a).

The Midrash (*Vayikra Rabbah* 34:15) explains that the term *chalitzah* holds four distinct meanings: “slipping,” “arming,” “saving,” and “leaving something resting in its place.” As an example of *chalitzah* in the sense of “slipping,” the Midrash mentions the *chalitzah* ceremony in which the *yevamah* “slips off” the shoe from her brother-in-

law’s foot (Deut. 25:9). As an example of “arming,” the Midrash cites the fact that soldiers of the Jewish Army were called *chalutzim* (Deut. 3:18), and said soldiers were presumably armed for battle. To adduce the “saving” meaning, the Midrash cites the verse, “May G-d ‘save me’ (*chaltzeini*) from an evil person” (Ps. 140:2), and to adduce the “resting” meaning of *chalitzah*, the Midrash cites the Shabbat liturgy in which we beseech G-d to “be appeased and let us rest” (*ritzay v’hachalitzeinu*).

Some of these meanings of *chalitzah* line up with the various meanings of *shemittah*: Just like *shemittah* refers to “slipping,” so does *chalitzah*. Just like *shemittah* refers to “escaping,” so does *chalitzah*. Just like *shemittah* refers to “forsaking/leaving something,” so does *chalitzah*. In fact, the Midrash in question actually uses a cognate of *shemittah* when noting that *chalitzah* can mean “slip” (although, Radak to Isa. 58:11 and in *Sefer HaShorashim* seems to have had an alternate version of the Midrash that instead used the word *shalaf* for that purpose, see below).

As Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim (1740–1814) explains it, *chalitzah* is characterized by “extracting” something from within something else that engulfs or envelops it. In the case of the Levirate *chalitzah* ritual, the woman must “extract” her brother-in-law’s foot from within his shoe. In other cases, the verb form of *chalitzah* refers to separating out something small from within something bigger. From example, when a house is stricken with *tzara’at* (roughly, “leprosy”), the affected stones must be extracted from the edifice, and the verb used for that action cognates with *chalitzah* (Lev. 14:40, 14:43). Similarly, when Moses told the Jews to conscript soldiers for their war against Midian, the word used for separating out those soldiers from the nation-at-large was a cognate of *chalitzah* (Num. 31:3), and the soldiers who were singled out from the rest of the nation were called *chalutzim* (Num. 32:30, Deut. 3:18).

In Biblical Hebrew, the “hips/thigh” is *chalatzaim*. This term typically appears in one of two contexts: a soldier girding himself for battle (Isa. 5:27, 11:5, 32:11, Job 38:3, 40:7) or the birth of a child (Gen. 35:11, I Kings 5:19, II Chron. 6:9, Jer. 30:6). *Shoresh Yeshu* explains that both of these contexts hearken back to other meanings of *chalitzah* discussed above,

positing that the hips/thigh was the place where soldier typically wore their weaponry (“arming”), or because that was place from which a newborn child can be said to “slip out” during birth. The Aramaic version of this word – *charatz* (see Dan. 5:6) – seems to be derived from the interchangeability of LAMMED and REISH.

Interestingly, in Aramaic the act of “removing clothing” is also a cognate of *chalitzah* (see Targum to I Sam. 31:8–9, I Chron. 10:8), possibly because stripping off one’s clothes is an act of extracting one’s body from within such garments. This Aramaic usage may be the etymological basis for the Modern Hebrew word *chultzah* (“shirt”). Nonetheless, Rabbi Dr. Ernest Klein (1899–1983) writes in his etymological dictionary that this term was originally coined by Prof. Joseph Klausner (1874–1958) to mean “blouse” and was derived from the “hips/thigh” meaning of *chalatzaim* (because a blouse typically covered the loins).

When the Bible reports that Delilah exerted pressure (*alatz*) on her husband Samson to divulge the secret behind his super-human strength, the Bible (Jud. 16:16) uses a cognate of the trilateral root ALEPH-LAMMED-TZADI to denote the pressure which she applied. Nachmanides (to Gen. 32:25) sees the ALEPH of *alatz* as interchangeable with the CHET of *chalatz*, which he understands as a metathesized permutation of *lachatz* (“pressure”). However, rabbinic tradition (*Sotah* 9b, *Bereishet Rabbah* 52:12) explains *alatz* differently as referring to Delilah “slipping away” (*nishmatah*) from underneath Samson in the throes of coital intimacy as a way of pressuring him to give away his secret. This suggests that perhaps the rabbis interpreted *alatz* as directly related to *chalatz* (not *lachatz*) – a contention I found expressed explicitly by Rabbi Moshe ben HaNessiah Britannico (13th century England) in his *Sefer HaShoham* and by Rabbi Yosef Chaim of Baghdad (1832–1909) in his *Ben Yehoyada* (to *Sotah* 9b).

Another Biblical Hebrew word that refers to “slipping off” is *shalaf* (derived from the trilateral root SHIN-LAMMED-PEH). In general, words from this root refer to “slipping” something out of its container to brandish it for another purpose. Cognates of *shalaf* appear 25 times in the Bible, most commonly when referring to the act of

drawing one’s sword from its sheath (Num. 22:23, 22:31, Josh. 5:13, Jud. 3:22, 8:10, 8:20, 9:54, 20:2, 20:15, 20:17, 20:25, 20:35, 20:46, I Sam. 17:51, 31:4, II Sam. 24:9, II Kings 3:26, I Chron. 10:4, 21:16, 21:25). Less commonly, cognates of *shalaf* refer to the act of “slipping off” one’s shoe (Ruth 4:7–8) for symbolic deal-making (the ancient equivalent of shaking hands). In fact, Targum pseudo-Jonathan (to Deut. 25:9) renders the verb form of *chalitzah* (in the context of the *chalitzah* ritual) as a cognate of *shalaf*. Rashi (to *Chullin* 53a and *Gittin* 33b) also connects these two verbs and ostensibly sees them as synonymous.

Fascinatingly, the Bible relates that one of the sons of Eber, Joktan, had a son named Shalaf (Gen. 10:26). According to Targum known as Jonathan (there) and Targum Rav Yosef (to I Chron. 1:20), Shalaf was said to have been the first to “draw” water from rivers (i.e., he invented irrigation canals), and his name seems to allude to this innovation.

Rabbi Pappenheim explains that *shalaf* is a portmanteau derived from the roots SHIN-LAMMED (“remove/taken away”) and ALEPH-PEH (“face”), in the sense of taking something out in a confrontational “in your face” way. He explains that *shalaf* differs from *chalitzah* in that *shalaf* is used whenever the two items in question were only loosely attached and could easily be separated. As noted above, most appearances of this root involve “slipping out” one’s sword from its sheath or “slipping off” one’s shoe for the purposes of a business transaction. In both situations, this action is typically performed as quickly as possible. In the case of a business deal, the buyer and seller want to seal the deal before the other one backs out, and in the case of a sword, a warrior needs his weapon to be readily at his disposal. Because of the need to swiftly be able to remove one’s sword or shoe, we would not expect them to be fastened too strongly.

In a similar vein, *Shoresh Yesha* notes that Biblical Hebrew uses three verbs to denote “removing” one’s shoe: *shal* (Ex. 3:5, Josh. 5:15), *shalaf*, and *chalitzah*. He explains that these three terms correspond to three different ways by which a shoe or sandal may be attached to one’s foot, with *shal* referring to slipping off one’s sandal without even using one’s hands, *shalaf* referring to taking off one’s shoe by hand, and *chalitzah* referring to removing a shoe fastened to the foot by first untying it.

What I found perplexing is the fact that the Talmud refers to a load mounted on top of an animal as a *shlif* (*Bava Kamma* 3a, see Rashi to *Bava Kamma* 17b, *Shabbat* 154b, *Erwin* 16a, and *Kiddushin* 22b). This word is seemingly derived from the trilateral SHIN-LAMMED-PEH, but I do not understand why the word for a parcel that somebody hopes will not “slip off” the animal’s back is derived from the act of

“slipping off.” Perhaps the word *shlif* refers to that very hope that it does not fall off the animal transporting it. Or, perhaps the word *shalaf* actually refers to the same sort of untying denoted by the word *chalitzah* (pace the *Shoresh Yesha*), so the term *shlif* refers to how one might remove the package from upon the animal after it reaches its final destination (see Rashi to *Bava Batra* 75b who notes that the *shlif* was *tied* to the animal).

PEREK SHIRA

by Rabbi Shmuel Kraines

THE SONG OF THE POMEGRANATE TREE

The pomegranate tree says: “Like a slice of pomegranate is the appearance of your cheekbones, behind your veil.” (*Shir HaShirim* 4:3)

This song is an excerpt from *Shir HaShirim*, in which Hashem praises the Jewish nation and describes its qualities with an analogy of a flawlessly beautiful bride. He describes her cheekbones as blushed, the color of a pomegranate. The figurative intention of this praise is that the Jewish nation is filled with 613 mitzvahs in the same way that the pomegranate contains hundreds of pulpy seeds. Based on this, one may suggest that the pomegranate crown represents the crown of the Torah.

The pomegranate sings that even “a slice of pomegranate,” meaning even a Jew who manages to fulfill only a “slice” of the Torah, still boasts innumerable “seeds.” In further depth, our Sages see

in the word “*rakah*” (slice) an allusion to “*reikah*” (empty one). Even the empty ones of the Jewish People are filled with seed-like merits. Each seed is edible by itself, and contains untold future potential. Thus, each pomegranate is filled with song of Hashem’s love for His entire nation.

The pomegranate teaches that even if we have merited amassing Torah and mitzvahs, we should still retain our modesty like a bride hides behind her veil – just as each pomegranate seed is covered within its husk. Moreover, in the same way, we should appreciate the sometimes hidden greatness of every single Jew.

- Sources: Sources: Rav Saadya Gaon and Rashi (combination); *Berachot* 57a; *Kol Rinah*

*In loving memory of Harav Zeev Shlomo ben Zecharia Leib

PARSHA PONDERERS

The Septennial Shabbat

by Rabbi Rafi Wolfe

“Speak to the people of Israel and say to them: “When you come to the land that I am giving you, the land will rest a Shabbat for Hashem.” (Leviticus 25:2)

This Torah portion begins by introducing the mitzvah of the *Shemittah* year. The land of Israel is to lie fallow for an entire year, with no agricultural work done to it. The year is described as “a Shabbat for Hashem.” What does this mean? Rashi suggests that it means “for the sake of Hashem.” Regarding the Shabbat of the seventh day of the week, we also find the expression “Shabbat for Hashem.” (Exodus 20:10) There it clearly means for the sake of Hashem, so that is what it should mean here. The Ramban finds difficulty in this explanation since we know that the Festivals are also for the sake of Hashem. Yet, we do not find the phrase “Shabbat for Hashem” associated with any of them. Is there any other way to understand this phrase – “a Shabbat for Hashem”?

There is a fundamental principle behind the mitzvah of *Shemittah*, as well as for most mitzvahs that Hashem has commanded us. The purpose behind them is so that people should know that there is a Creator Who rules over them. Since Hashem gave over the Earth to mankind, a person over the course of their lifetime could really begin to think that the world is theirs. Mankind is the master over his domain – and no one else. He would completely forget Hashem. Therefore, Hashem surrounded mankind such that all of his actions and movements will be governed by laws and statutes, which remind and show us that Hashem is the Creator. Hashem gives mankind the strength to live, and everything comes from Him.

For example, someone with a field faces laws that relate to its plowing, planting and harvesting. They cannot plow with two different animals at once. They cannot plant two species together. They cannot harvest the entire field, but must leave over some of it for the poor. While harvesting, sheaves that fall out of their hand need to be left for the poor. After the field

owners have finished in the field, if they realized they have forgotten any sheaves out there, they must to abandon those as well for the poor. After finishing all the work on the produce, they have to separate portions of the crop to give to the *Kohanim* and the *Levi'im*. When kneading the flour into dough, they have to further separate a portion of the dough for the *Kohanim* (called *challah*). As they sit to eat their bread, they must less Hashem both before and after eating.

This is the principle behind the mitzvah of *Shemittah*. The Torah commands it by referring to the Land of Israel as being the land which Hashem gave to us. The Land of Israel was given over as a complete gift to the Jewish People. A Jew could very easily slip into the mindset that they are ultimate masters over it. They will forget that Hashem is still in charge, controlling who deserves to live there and who does not.

That is why once every seven years there is a mitzvah to let the land lie fallow. There will be “a Shabbat for Hashem.” This means that we will remember and see with all of the details of this mitzvah that the land belongs to Hashem. We are merely considered as hired workers for the land. When the time comes, we will be out of a job, and the land is to remain uncultivated. Hashem decided that there will be no more plowing and no more planting. He is in charge.

And this is also the idea behind the weekly Shabbat. It is called a Shabbat for Hashem. Meaning, mankind on Shabbat is completely dedicated to Hashem. Six days of the week we are permitted to work, and we might think that our strength is what produces results. Therefore, Hashem gave us the day of Shabbat. All productive, creative work is forbidden. Man’s physical strength is put on hold. It is a day of complete rest, complete dedication to Hashem.

This is the comparison between the weekly Shabbat and the Shabbat of *Shemittah*. Both serve as recognition that we are not in charge. Our weekly or yearly productivity is not producing our results. Everything comes from Hashem. We need to be reminded that there is a Creator Who rules over us. The land and everything in it are His. They are both a

Shabbat to Hashem. During both of them, mankind is completely dedicated to Hashem.

Shabbat Shalom.

**This essay is based on Da'at Torah by Rav Yerucham Levovitz to Leviticus 25:2*

LETTER AND SPIRIT

Insights based on the writings of Rav S.R. Hirsch by Rabbi Yosef Herschman

Conflict of Interest

In our “money makes money” world, the prohibition against interest is difficult to understand. Both the borrower and lender recognize the time-value and investment-value of money. The borrower, in the primary situation contemplated by the Torah, borrows money for business purposes. He intends to, and hopefully does, turn the capital into something worth more than the principal. And the lender would not have had his money sit idle; if not for the loan, that money would have been invested, in turn making more money. It would seem only fair for the borrower to repay the lender – the growth he enjoyed comes at the expense of the growth the lender surrendered.

Yet, the Torah contains not one but two prohibitions: The lender is prohibited from charging interest, and the borrower is prohibited from giving it. The two words used in the Torah provide some insight. Interest from the standpoint of the borrower is called *neshech*, literally a “bite,” whereas *tarbit* (excess) is interest from the standpoint of the gain to the lender. If the reason for the prohibition were the immorality of interest, the Torah would not have prohibited, with equal severity, the *paying* of interest. Nor would it have limited the prohibition of interest to transactions among Jews. Rather, the two prohibitions of taking and paying interest reflect the truth that Hashem is the Master of our possessions. Just as He is Master of our landed property, as reflected in the proximate laws of *Shemittah* and *Yovel* in this *parsha*, He is Master of our movable possessions as well. Were we the true owners of our money, and were our loan acts deriving entirely from our own free will, then the business model would prevail.

Interest would not be considered a “bite” from the borrower (as he expects to grow the principal) nor an “excess” to the lender (as he would have grown the capital if left in his possession). The transaction would merely compensate the lender’s loss with the borrower’s gain.

But the Torah teaches that our money is not absolutely our own. The right to exercise control over our money belongs to Hashem, and it is He Who commands us to place some of our assets – which are His, but which happen to be in our hands – into the hands of our brother, to enable him not only to subsist, but also to continue his business endeavors. As soon as the money is lent, it ceases to be the lender’s property and becomes the property of the borrower. The gain he realizes from the capital is *his* gain. Were the lender to demand any part of the borrower’s earning, he would be taking a “bite” from the borrower’s personal assets. The money is no longer the property of the lender, because he is duty-bound by the Torah to lend; any interest is in “excess” of what is his.

The Torah concludes this prohibition with the words *and you shall fear Hashem*. Charging interest would be justified as normative social and business practice were it not for the fear of Hashem, and the recognition that He is the true Owner of our assets. The duty to lend money without interest, writes Rav Hirsch, is the “granite rock foundation on which the society of the Jewish People is based.” It is a cardinal duty, through which we express our homage to Him through acts of sacrifice in daily life.

TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Yevamot 51-57

The Stages of a Life

When Rabbi Yochanan posed a question to his teacher Rabbi Oshea, he received no reply. But when Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish asked the same Sage a different question, he received an answer. Rabbi Yehuda HaNassi was puzzled by the silence that greeted Rabbi Yochanan's question and asked Rabbi Oshea, "Is Rabbi Yochanan not great enough to also deserve a reply?"

Rabbi Oshea answered that the reason for his silence was that there was no answer to Rabbi Yochanan's question.

This account of Resh Lakish studying Torah with Rabbi Oshea, the teacher of Rabbi Yochanan, is cited by Tosefot as support for the position of the Rabbeinu Tam that Resh Lakish had already been a Torah

scholar before his famous encounter with Rabbi Yochanan. But, Rabbeinu Tam claims, Resh Lakish had abandoned his life of Torah, and became the leader of thieves. Eventually, when Resh Lakish encountered Rabbi Yochanan, Rabbi Yochanan promised him his extraordinarily attractive sister in marriage as persuasion for return to the Torah and its study, first as a disciple and then as a colleague who often disputed Rabbi Yochanan's halachic opinions.

The incident in our *gemara* occurred during the first phase of Resh Lakish's eventful life, when he studied Torah in the presence of Rabbi Yochanan's teacher. It was only later that the encounter with Rabbi Yochanan took place, an encounter that set the stage for the latter, glorious phase of Resh Lakish's life as one of the greatest Torah scholars in history.

▪ Yevamot 57a

Ohrnet Magazine is a weekly Torah magazine published by Ohr Somayach Institutions
POB 18103, Jerusalem 91180, Israel - Tel +972-2-581-0315 · Email. ohr@ohr.edu

Contributing authors, editors and production team: Rabbi Nota Schiller – Rosh HaYeshiva, Rabbi Yitzchak Breitowitz - Rav of Kehillos Ohr Somayach, Avi Kaufman, Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein, Rabbi Reuven Lauffer, Rabbi Yaakov Meyers, Mrs. Rosalie Moriah, Rabbi Moshe Newman, Rabbi Shlomo Simon, Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair, Rabbi Yehuda Spitz, Mrs. Helena Stern.

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