

The Narrow Bridge

גשר צר מאוד

PARSHA PERSPECTIVES

Short Divrei Torah on Parshas Behar

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IT'S A SURE WIN

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

"And Hashem spoke to Moshe on Har Sinai, saying, 'Speak to the Children of Israel and say to them: When you come into the land that I give you, the land shall observe a Sabbath for Hashem.'" (25:1-2)

Mashal: There was once an avid sports enthusiast who enjoyed following his favorite team. He was a very dedicated fan and would never miss a game. One weekend, he had to go out of town and knew he would not be able to watch his team play, so he asked a friend to record the game for him so he could watch it when he returned. The friend did so, and just as he was handing over the recording, he said, "Wow, great game. Your team won!"

The man sat down to watch the game, and immediately his team fell behind. By halftime they were trailing by twenty points. Normally, he would have been nervous, wringing his hands and sitting at the edge of his seat. But this time, because he knew that in the end his team was going to win, he was calm and relaxed and thoroughly enjoyed watching his team's great comeback.

Nimshal: This same concept applies to faith in Hashem. When a person places his trust in Hashem, he knows that everything in his life is going to turn out well. There may be some hitches along the way, but he knows that the Almighty will not fail him. Even if, at some point in his life, he finds himself trailing by twenty points at halftime, he trusts that in the end he will overcome and succeed, so nothing will ever upset him or get him down. Similarly, the *mitzvah* of *shemittah* is a lesson in *emunah*. It is a *mitzvah* whereby Hashem tells His chosen nation not to worry: "I will take care of you and all your needs if you just follow My word. Even if you have no idea where your food will come from, be calm and be relaxed. Just have faith in Me, and I guarantee that My 'team,' Klal Yisrael, will always make a grand comeback and win!"

STRAIGHT FROM THE SOURCE

Rabbi Moshe Schochet

"And Hashem spoke to Moshe on Har Sinai, saying, 'Speak to the Children of Israel and say to them: When you come into the land that I give you, the land shall observe a Sabbath for Hashem.'" (25:1-2)

Rashi asks why the Torah begins introducing the laws of *shemittah* with the fact that they were taught at Har Sinai. Weren't all of the *mitzvos* taught at Har Sinai?

Rashi explains that the Torah is telling us that just as the *mitzvah* of *shemittah*, with all of its rules and regulations, was taught at Har Sinai, the same is true with all of the other *mitzvos* of the Torah as well.

Many of the *meforshim* [commentators] are not satisfied with Rashi's suggestion. It does not seem to adequately answer the question as to why the *pasuk* specifically chooses to mention that the *mitzvah* of *shemittah* was taught at Har Sinai more than any other *mitzvah*.

Rav Shimon Schwab (Maayan Beis Hashoeivah) explains that *shemittah* is a *mitzvah* that could only be mandated by Hashem. Only Hashem, Who is in control of the world, could require that all fields in Eretz Yisrael lay dormant for an entire year without concern that it would lead to a national famine.

Therefore, the Torah is teaching us that the same way that *shemittah* was undeniably instructed by Hashem to Moshe on Har Sinai, so too all of the other *mitzvos* of the Torah were taught by Hashem to Moshe on Har Sinai.

We have an incredible privilege each and every day to fulfill the *mitzvos* that Hashem commanded us on Har Sinai to do. Unfortunately, we sometimes take those opportunities for granted. Let us take advantage and re-energize ourselves when performing the *mitzvos* so that they will serve as a conduit that will help us intensify our relationship with Hashem.

HUMBLE PRIDE

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“And Hashem spoke to Moshe on Har Sinai, saying, ‘Speak to the Children of Israel and say to them: When you come into the land that I give you, the land shall observe a Sabbath for Hashem.’” (25:1-2)

We are told that G-d chose to give the Torah on Har Sinai because it was the lowest - i.e., humblest - mountain. But if G-d meant to teach us humility, He seemingly should have given the Torah in a valley. What is the paradox implied in the lowest of mountains?

Although humility is a necessary component of spiritual life, so is a certain measure of pride (see Sotah 5a). A totally selfless person will feel powerless when he encounters the challenges, doubts, cynicism, and mockery of a world that obscures G-dliness. Hence, we must also be “mountains,” mastering the art of asserting ourselves as the representatives of G-d on earth.

It is precisely true self-abnegation that enables us to exhibit true self-assertion: when we have lost all sense of ego, we are no longer aware of ourselves, including our self-abnegation; our consciousness of self has been supplanted by our consciousness of G-d. (Sichot Kodesh 5740, vol. 2, pp. 86-91; Likutei Sichot, vol. 17, pp. 304-307; ibid., vol. 22, pp. 159-163; ibid., vol. 1, pp. 273-279; Sichot Kodesh 5737, p. 755) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

BECAUSE HASHEM SAID SO

Rabbi Moshe Schochet

“And Hashem spoke to Moshe on Har Sinai, saying, ‘Speak to the Children of Israel and say to them: When you come into the land that I give you, the land shall observe a Sabbath for Hashem.’” (25:1-2)

Rashi asks why the Torah begins introducing the laws of *shemittah* with the fact that they were taught at Har Sinai. Weren't all of the *mitzvos* taught at Har Sinai (see previous *dvar Torah* for Rashi's answer)?

Rav Moshe Feinstein (Darash Moshe) explains that a farmer would likely allow his field to lay fallow even without the obligation of *shemittah*. After all, it is beneficial to allow the fields to rest in order to replenish their nutrients. Therefore, the Torah goes out of its way to state that the *mitzvah* of *shemittah* was taught by Hashem on Har Sinai in order to communicate that the reason we observe the *mitzvos* is solely because Hashem instructed us to do so; we have no other ulterior motives.

Rav Moshe is reminding us why we do *mitzvos*. We do not do *mitzvos* because they make sense or benefit us. We do *mitzvos* because that is what Hashem has commanded us to do.

This is an important lesson that we must always be cognizant of so that the *mitzvos* can serve to strengthen our connection with Hashem.

CLEAR PROOF

Chasam Sofer

“And Hashem spoke to Moshe on Har Sinai, saying, ‘Speak to the Children of Israel and say to them: When you come into the land that I give you, the land shall observe a Sabbath for Hashem.’” (25:1-2)

What does the subject of the Sabbatical year have to do with Har Sinai? The commandment pertaining to the observance of the Sabbatical year is in itself a convincing proof that the Torah was certainly not a mere figment of Moshe's mind, but of Divine origin. What human being could have said of himself, “Then I will command My blessing upon you... and it shall bring forth produce for the three years” (25:21)? Only Hashem could have made such a statement. This makes it clear that none other than Hashem Himself could have given Israel the Torah on Har Sinai.

RESTING FOR HASHEM

Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

“And Hashem spoke to Moshe on Har Sinai, saying, ‘Speak to the Children of Israel and say to them: When you come into the land that I give you, the land shall observe a Sabbath for Hashem.’” (25:1-2)

On the verse (Shemos 31:13) “You speak to the Jewish people, saying, ‘Only keep My Shabbosos,” the Arizal (and similarly the Tur) comments that during the Egyptian servitude, Moshe asked Pharaoh to give the Jewish people one day of respite every week so that they could work with greater vigor on the remaining days of the week. Pharaoh acceded to the request, and Moshe chose the day of Shabbos. When the Jewish people were later commanded by G-d to observe Shabbos, “Moshe rejoiced in the gift of his portion” (liturgy for Shabbos morning, Shemoneh Esrei), since even before G-d's command, he had thought to designate this day as a day of rest.

This, then, is the deeper meaning of the phrase “You speak to the Jewish people” regarding the *mitzvah* of Shabbos. Since Moshe had previously arranged for the Jewish people to rest on Shabbos, he was now to inform them, “Keep My (G-d's) Shabbosos.” The Children of Israel were to rest on Shabbos not in order to rest from work but because of G-d's command to cease all forms of work on Shabbos.

Similarly, this is the underlying meaning of the phrase “the land shall rest a Shabbos to G-d.” For it was a widespread practice among farmers at that time to plow the land one year and to leave it fallow the next, in order to improve the field's yield. In this context came the pronouncement from G-d telling us that the land shall lie fallow in the seventh year, the *shemittah* year, when the land must rest. This should not be simply for the good of the land, but as “a Shabbos to G-d” - because of His command.

BEYOND LOGIC

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein

“And Hashem spoke to Moshe on Har Sinai, saying.” (25:1)

From the words *בהר סיני* we learn that the entire Torah was given on Har Sinai. Even the *mitzvos* which were commanded before Sinai are binding only because they were communicated to Moshe at Sinai (see Rambam, Hil. Melachim 8:11). Even the seven Noahide laws are binding because Hashem told Moshe at Sinai that the Noahides were already commanded to keep these *mitzvos*. It is important to understand the difference between the command to Moshe at Sinai and that given to Adam and Noach. The purpose of the original command was to explain the seven Noahide *mitzvos*, in order that they be observed because of their rationale, and not merely because Hashem had so ordained. Indeed, we find that there were many righteous people who kept the seven *mitzvos* prior to the giving of the Torah, such as the disciples of Shem and Ever, who were probably rather numerous, and the people whom Avraham taught and proselytized in Charan. Yet, as far as we know, none of them had any righteous descendants, and only the Patriarchs had righteous offspring, the people of Israel. The reason is that the former observed the *mitzvos* only because they understood them intellectually. With this approach, the *mitzvos* could not be transmitted to future generations because not everyone comprehends the *mitzvos* in an intellectual fashion. Some surely thought that they understood them better than their forebears, whereas, in fact, they did not, and their comprehension of those *mitzvos* was subjective. Consequently, they lived their lives in conformance with their own personal prejudices. However, the imperative of observance of the *mitzvos* given at Sinai is not because of their rationale, but solely because they are the word of G-d, and one must comply with His will. Observance with this approach will guarantee their fulfillment, even by one's descendants.

For this reason, the words *בהר סיני* appear specifically as an introduction to the *mitzvah* of the Sabbatical year, because that *mitzvah* is one which is impossible to observe for any reason other than that it is the command of Hashem. Although one may observe its strictures for philosophical reasons, it will not be kept to perfection unless it is understood that compliance is demanded because Hashem so decreed. Otherwise, it would be impossible to live for an entire year and to relinquish ownership from whatever grows on its own. The *mitzvah* can, perforce, be fulfilled properly, only because it is Hashem's command - and as such we can expect Him to bless the yield of our fields to supply our needs even though they were left fallow. The same holds true for every *mitzvah*. The reason we must observe it is solely because it is the Divine imperative. The *mitzvah* of *shemittah* is introduced with the words *בהר סיני* because, as we explained, there can be no mistake concerning the Divine origin of this *mitzvah*, for who but G-d can promise that even one who does not sow will have enough produce to last for three years.

DOING OUR PART

Rabbi Avi Wiesenfeld

“And Hashem spoke to Moshe on Har Sinai, saying.” (25:1)

The verse in this week's Parshah says, *ידבר ה' אל משה בהר סיני* - “Hashem spoke to Moshe at Har Sinai...,” introducing to us the *mitzvah* of *Shemittah*. This *mitzvah* requires farmers living in Eretz Yisrael to leave their land fallow every seven years. Rashi asks, why is this specific commandment in particular introduced by the statement that Hashem gave this *mitzvah* to Moshe Rabbeinu at Har Sinai? All of the *mitzvos* were given at Har Sinai! Rashi answers that the Torah is teaching us that just as this *mitzvah* was given at Har Sinai, so, too, all of the *mitzvos* were given at Har Sinai.

This answer, however, raises another question. Why was the specific *mitzvah* of *Shemittah* chosen as the prototype *mitzvah* to teach us that all *mitzvos* were given at Har Sinai? The Chasam Sofer provides a beautiful explanation. The *mitzvah* of *Shemittah* teaches us a basic foundation in *emunah* which can be applied to all of the *mitzvos*. When a farmer is asked to leave his entire livelihood for a full year and rely directly on Hashem to provide for him, he is demonstrating a tremendous level of *emunah* in Hashem. He is showing that Hashem is in full control of this universe and that we are totally dependent on Him for all of our needs.

A *baalas teshuvah* once called me up and explained that her sister, who was tragically married to a non-Jew, was coming to Israel on a business trip. Her sister and her sister's non-Jewish husband had invited her with her family to spend a weekend together with them in a hotel in Tel Aviv. She called to ask if they would be able to eat the food in that particular hotel on Shabbos. After making some inquiries, I regretfully informed the woman that the *hechsher* in that particular hotel was not suitable and they would not be able to eat there. She accepted my response and decided that she had no choice but to bring all of the food for Shabbos with her to the hotel.

Not wanting her religious children to see much of Tel Aviv, they arrived at the hotel very close to Shabbos. The receptionist at the hotel desk asked to see negative corona test results for all of the children before he could allow them to enter the hotel. Shocked to hear that this was a requirement, the father of the family explained that he was unaware that they needed these tests and therefore did not carry the test results with him. He pleaded for an exception to be allowed entry, explaining that he could not drive back to their home in Yerushalayim now so close to Shabbos. The hotel receptionist held firm to the rule and would not allow them entry into the hotel.

Faced with no other choice, he returned to his wife in the car and explained their predicament. His wife had an idea - to call an agency to see if they could rent an apartment nearby. At least then, she reasoned, they could walk to the hotel and join her sister and brother-in-law for at least part of Shabbos.

They managed to find something suitable nearby and, with a mere few minutes until the start of Shabbos they unpacked all of the food they had prepared and brought it into the apartment. The husband called me a week later relaying the tremendous *hashgachah pratis* in this story. Only because his wife had called to ask a *halachic* question regarding the *hechsher* of the hotel, and undertook the tremendous work of preparing and packing all of the food for the Shabbos meals, did they end up having food at all for Shabbos. Had they been refused entry into the hotel and been stuck with no food, it would have turned out to be a disaster.

We see again from this story that when we put in the effort and do our part, Hashem comes to our assistance and does the rest for us!

SHABBAT ENERGY

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"When you come into the land that I give you, the land shall observe a Sabbath for Hashem." (25:2)

Just as the weekly Shabbat is intended to allow us the freedom to pursue spiritual growth, the same is true of the sabbatical year. Hashem therefore instructs us to envision the sabbatical year as the goal of the work we do during the six preceding years, keeping it constantly in mind throughout as we work toward it. In this way, the inspiration of the sabbatical year will sanctify, energize, and focus the work we perform during the "mundane" years, bringing them Divinely-blessed success and infusing them with the joy of optimism and purpose.

The same holds true for the weekly Shabbat. Keeping the goal of the Shabbat in mind during the workweek sanctifies, energizes, and focuses our work, bringing success, joy, and optimism to the entire week.

"Entering our land" is also a metaphor for setting up our homes, whether at the beginning of our married lives or whenever we seek to revitalize our home life. We should set up our homes with the goal of the Shabbat in mind, creating an atmosphere conducive to spiritual growth and harmony. This way, every Shabbat will be imbued with spiritual content, thereby being a source of renewal and hope for ourselves, our families, and our guests. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 12, pp. 245-249) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

IT COMES FROM ABOVE

Rabbi Moshe Schochet

"When you come into the land that I give you, the land shall observe a Sabbath for Hashem. For six years you may sow your field and for six years you may prune your vineyard; and you may gather in its crop." (25:2-3)

The Slonimer Rebbe (Nesivos Shalom) asks why the Torah first discusses the *shemittah* year, which is the seventh year, and only afterwards mentions the first six years.

The Slonimer Rebbe explains that Hashem wanted to set the tone from the beginning that no matter what effort we put into working the fields, we need to remember that Hashem is in charge.

The Torah begins by discussing the *shemittah* year in order to first acknowledge that our survival is dependent on Hashem. Once the Torah establishes that reality, it then discusses the six years that we as human beings are to work the land.

It is for this reason that the Torah mentions the *shemittah* year prior to the six years.

In life, we frequently fall into the trap of thinking that our success is a result of our hard work. We feel that we are in control of our prosperity. The Torah is reminding us that Hashem is in control of everything in our lives.

If we are able to internalize this message, then we will be sure to lead lives filled with deep *emunah*, which puts our full trust and confidence in Hashem, resulting in true *simchas hachaim* [joy of life].

SHARING OUR BLESSINGS

Rabbi Jeremy Finn

"For six years you may sow your field and for six years you may prune your vineyard; and you may gather in its crop. But on the seventh year, the land shall have a complete rest, a Sabbath for Hashem; your field you shall not sow and your vineyard you shall not prune." (25:3-4)

The Meshech Chochmah notes that the Torah instructs us to work the land for six years and to rest on the seventh. This is parallel to working for six days of the week and resting on Shabbos.

In the description of Creation in Parashas Bereishis, the words "כי טוב - It was good," are mentioned twice on the third day and twice on the sixth day (Bereishis 1:10, 12, 25, 31).

This is known as *יום שנכפל בו כי טוב*, and as a result, it is seen as auspicious to celebrate a wedding or other *simchah* on a Tuesday or on a Friday. These are days associated explicitly with everything טוב. The parallel to day three and day six of creation are years three and six of the *shemittah* cycle.

Where is the particular association with טוב in these years?

The Meshech Chochmah points out that these are the years in which we are instructed to give a special tithe to the poor, called *Maaser Ani*. As part of one's annual distribution of *terumos* and *maaseros*, in years three and six, one needs to separate a tithe from one's crop and give it to the poor. It is this *Maaser Ani* that is parallel to the double expression of כי טוב that is found on days three and six of creation.

The message is that we can only enjoy the blessing, and things can only be טוב, if we share them with others less fortunate than ourselves. (Parpera'os LaTorah, p. 193)

A TIME FOR PEACE

Kli Yakar

"But on the seventh year, the land shall have a complete rest, a Sabbath for Hashem..." (25:4)

During *Shemittah*, there is no sowing or harvesting, nor has anyone contributed to the produce in the fields. Consequently, no one has any rights or claims of ownership.

Since most arguments originate from the impulse for ownership, the *Shemittah* year, when everyone is equal, is the true formula for peace.

FIELD OF TRANSCENDENCE

Reb Noson of Breslov

"But on the seventh year, the land shall have a complete rest, a Sabbath for Hashem; your field you shall not sow and your vineyard you shall not prune." (25:4)

During the Sabbatical and Jubilee years, agricultural property and crops are declared ownerless and everyone can partake of the crops.

These years represent levels that transcend the limitations of this world. On those levels, unity prevails and everything is joined together. Thus, the fields and crops belong to everyone. (Likutey Halakhot IV, p. 184a)

GUARANTEED SUCCESS

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"But on the seventh year, the land shall have a complete rest, a Sabbath for Hashem... I will ordain My blessing upon you in the sixth year and it shall yield produce sufficient for the three years." (25:4)

Although leaving the land fallow for a year may indeed improve its fertility, this cannot be the purpose of the sabbatical year. If it were, Hashem would have promised to increase the yield of the year following the fallow year, not the year preceding it.

By promising an increased yield in the sixth year - which should naturally be the least productive - Hashem shows us that it is specifically and exclusively His blessing that is the source of the increased yield.

The lesson for us is as follows: As Jews, we are required to spend time every day praying and studying the Torah; we must give charity, support Jewish education, and abstain from work on the Shabbat and Jewish holidays. How can we hope to live financially sound lives when our non-Jewish neighbors, who are not "handicapped" by any of these obligations and restrictions, struggle to earn their livelihood?

The sabbatical year teaches us that when we do what Hashem desires, He will bless us - not only spiritually, but materially as well. (Likutei Sichot vol. 2, pp. 548-549) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

RESPECT THE HOST'S RULES

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

"But in the seventh year; there shall be a complete rest for the Land." (25:4)

The Torah tells us (Vayikra 26:33-34) that the strict punishment for working the land of Eretz Yisrael during the *shemittah* year is exile. There are many sins which are seemingly far worse than transgressing the *mitzvah* of allowing the land to remain fallow, yet we do not find that the Jewish People are sent into exile if they transgress these sins. What is it about rejecting the *mitzvah* of *shemittah* that warrants such a harsh punishment?

The Kli Yakar (Vayikra 25:3) answers this question with a principle which we can demonstrate through the following parable: Yet another group have turned up at Mr. Cohen's beautiful Jerusalem apartment to be hosted at one of his famous barbecues. The tables are set outside in the magnificent balcony, the drinks are out, the food is ready, and the music is on. "Eat and drink as much as you like, and enjoy yourselves," he says, concluding his introduction to the group of young visitors who came on a university trip from America. "Just one thing," he adds, as the music is lowered once again, "everyone can stick around, but the music has to be off by eleven o'clock. Oh, and the house is out of bounds, I'm afraid. But everything you'll need is right here, and if you need anything else, just ask." Soon enough, everyone is having a great time, and as eleven o'clock approaches it seems like the party isn't going to stop. At exactly eleven o'clock Mr. Cohen turns the music off. But no sooner has the music stopped, someone turns it straight back on again. Mr. Cohen looks around for the tour leader but he's nowhere to be found. Then, in the corner of his eye, Mr. Cohen spots him - inside his house, taking a cake out of his fridge! Furious, Mr. Cohen barges into the house and confronts the tour leader who nonchalantly proceeds to sit in Mr. Cohen's chair and relax with his feet on the coffee table as he takes a bite of cake. Left with no other choice, Mr. Cohen sends the entire group out of his premises.

Similarly, the Kli Yakar answers that Hashem is the sole Owner of the land, yet He allows us to benefit from it as guests. (In fact, this is explicitly stated in the verse, "The Land may not be sold in perpetuity, for the Land is Mine; you are settlers and residents with me." Accordingly, if it comes to the point where the guests begin to use the land as they please, ignoring the will of the Owner, the logical consequence is that they are sent away, demonstrating the reality of Who really is in charge of the land.

Although most of us do not have fields in Eretz Yisrael with which to fulfill this *mitzvah*, we can still take the message to heart, since in reality, we are all guests in Hashem's world, and our stay here is, to some degree, contingent on how we respect our surroundings and follow the Host's rules. Perhaps if we behave with this in mind and show appreciation to Hashem as we would if we were a guest in someone's home, then we will be granted a longer stay and develop a closer relationship with the Owner.

SHABBAT BLESSINGS

Rebbe Nachman

"The Shabbat-produce of the land will be food for you, your servant, your maidservant, your hired hand, and the resident worker who stays with you." (25:6)

Shabbat brings blessing. This is true of both the weekly Shabbat and the Sabbatical year. When you keep Shabbat, it "will be food for you." Shabbat brings blessing and abundance to you and to the entire universe. (See Likutey Moharan I, 58:4)

IN THIS TOGETHER

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

"On Yom Kippur you shall sound the Shofar throughout the land..." (25:9)

The Gemara (Rosh Hashana 8b) explains that the Shofar was sounded throughout the land on Yom Kippur of the *Yovel* (Jubilee Year) to announce that it was time for all the Jewish slaves to leave their masters and return to their homes.

The Sefer HaChinuch offers an incredible insight into why there was a special *Mitzvah* to blow the Shofar at this time. He explains that it would have been very difficult for the slave-owners to release their Jewish slaves. Let alone the financial loss and the help they received, the many years that they had spent together were coming to an end, and the fulfillment of this *Mitzvah* of freeing their slaves would have distressed the slave-owners immensely.

Therefore, the Shofar was sounded so that every slave-owner would know that they were not facing this challenge alone. By knowing that others also faced this test, the slave-owners would be comforted and strengthened to fulfill this *Mitzvah* with great joy.

From these words we learn how much we are affected by our surroundings, and for this reason alone we see how important it is to dwell among righteous people, as the Gemara tells us: "Goodness [is bestowed] to a *Tzaddik* (and as a result) Goodness [is bestowed] to his neighbor."

CONTROLLING OUR EMOTIONS

Rabbi Jeremy Finn

"This fiftieth year shall be a Yovel for you; you shall not sow, reap its aftergrowth, or pick [its grapes] that you had set aside [for yourself]." (25:11)

Rabbi Yosef Zvi Dunner writes that if we examine the *Yovel* year, we will see that there are primarily two *mitzvos* associated with it that at first glance seem to be unrelated. The first is the return of property to its ancestral owner, and the second is the prohibition against working the land, as in a *shemittah* year.

However, a more in-depth examination will reveal that these two *mitzvos* are intrinsically connected.

When a person receives his ancestral field again - the same field that he was forced to sell due to economic difficulty - he is obviously thrilled. His natural desire would be to set to work immediately on his newly returned land. This has been his dream during all the years that he waited for its return. It is therefore at this point that Hashem tells him that he is not permitted to work his land, reminding him that he does not own the property and cannot do with it as he pleases.

All land ultimately belongs to Hashem. It is only entrusted to us for a limited time in order for us to use it to serve Him. Therefore, the *mitzvah* to return the land, and the prohibition to work it, serve to highlight that Hashem is the true owner of everything. (Mikdash HaLevi, p. 387)

There is, however, another message that we can learn from these two aspects of the *Yovel* year.

Sometimes, what fuels us to serve Hashem is not what Hashem wants us to do but what we feel like doing. If our mood, desires, and wishes happen to align with what Hashem demands, we end up observing Hashem's commandments. However, in a clash between what I want to do and what Hashem requires of me, who wins?

The landowner desires to begin working his returned land immediately. Hashem forbids him to do so during *Yovel*. There is a clash; who will win?

The aim in life is to tune one's desires so that they automatically align with what Hashem demands (Avos 2:4).

An example of how one needs to be in control of one's emotions and desires is found in an incident recorded about Rav Dessler.

During the Second World War, Rav Dessler was in England while his wife and daughter were in Australia. In total, they were separated for six years. Contact between the two countries was difficult, and the only method of communication was through writing letters, which even then was sporadic.

One morning, a letter arrived from his wife and daughter. From the shape of the envelope, it was clear that there were photographs enclosed. The mere sight of the letter set off powerful emotional reactions in Rav Dessler. Any other person would not have wasted a second and would have torn open the envelope immediately to see the photographs and read the letter enclosed. Rav Dessler, however, placed the letter on the mantlepiece and waited a full ten minutes before opening it. (Rav Dessler (Artscroll), p. 184)

Any strong desire must be controlled, for if not, the *yetzer hara* has an opening to gain a foothold. Everything that we experience must be controlled and used to further our relationship with Hashem.

CAUTIOUS SPEECH

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

"When you sell anything to your fellow or purchase from your fellow, do not cheat one another." (25:14)

The Torah conveys the rules of land purchases and mandates that we not wrong one another (25:14) and, a few *pesukim* later, repeats, "And you shall not wrong one man to his fellow Jew, and you shall fear your G-d..." (25:17). Why is this directive repeated, and why is the fear of G-d included the second time?

The Gemara (Bava Metzia) explains that the second instance instructs us not to verbally abuse each other. The Torah uses the unique word "Amito" (translated as fellow Jew), which can be split into two words that mean "a nation" and "with him." The words themselves indicate that our sentiment should be one of brotherhood: looking to help rather than abuse one another.

The Torah concludes that causing someone anguish through words is more severe a sin than cheating monetarily and that we'll ultimately have to answer to G-d for such wrongdoings, emphasizing the powerful effect of our words and how careful we must be when wielding those words.

COMMITMENT TO TRY

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"When you sell anything to your fellow or purchase from your fellow, do not cheat one another." (25:14)

Most of us cannot honestly promise that all our future ideas and emotions will be holy and positive, since we cannot control which ideas will occur to us and how we will emotionally react to what happens to us. What we can promise is that we will try to think, talk, and act in accordance with these ideals.

This is similar to how, according to Jewish law, a person can only give someone else something the giver truly possesses. One cannot, for example, give someone the fruit that an existing tree will produce in the future, since this fruit does not yet exist. One can, however, "give" someone the fruit-producing aspect of the tree, since this does presently exist. By the force of that gift, the other person will indeed receive whatever fruit the tree produces in the future.

In this analogy, the tree corresponds to our intellect and emotions, whereas its fruit corresponds to the thoughts, words, and deeds that our intellect and emotions produce. Although we cannot promise that every future thought, word, and deed will be holy and positive, we can promise to refine our intellect and emotions as best we can - through prayer, study, and meditation. With G-d's help, this will ensure that our thoughts, words, and deeds will indeed be holy and positive. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 27, pp. 176-179) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

COUNTLESS OPPORTUNITIES

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

"When you sell anything to your fellow or purchase from your fellow, do not cheat one another." (25:14)

Rashi explains that the Torah is discussing the idea of victimization, where one Jew should avoid hurting another Jew financially by setting a price that is too high or too low. Based on the number of years until *Yovel* - the jubilee year, in which all land transactions revert back to the original owners, a fair and reasonable price should be established with a mutual understanding of the equitable terms of the deal.

R' Nachum Twersky zt'l of Chernobyl (Meor Einayim) writes that when a person engages in business in a completely honest manner, and avoids such deceitful practices as price-fixing, charging interest, and employing inaccurate weights and measures, this in itself is considered a great and holy spiritual act of Divine service. When someone performs an actual business exchange (be it a cow for a donkey, or money for goods), and in the process concerns himself with all the relevant Torah laws and *dinim* of *Choshen Mishpat*, is it not obvious that this is an elevated level of serving Hashem?

It is all too easy for us to forget that apparently "mundane" matters can be filled with holiness. We expect to find religion only in *shul* and while performing certain rituals. The rest of our day, our business dealings and the way we interact with others is not imbued with the same *kedushah* as spiritual matters, we feel. This is wrong! When viewed properly, our days are filled with opportunities to serve Hashem. Honesty in business, raising children to be upright and G-d-fearing, small acts of kindness - are also Torah commandments, and the will of Hashem. One cannot even imagine how many *mitzvos* a person can perform in a single day.

JEWS AND GENTILES ALIKE

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

"When you sell anything to your fellow or purchase from your fellow, do not cheat one another." (25:14)

Rav Baruch Epstein zt'l (Torah Temimah) explains that *amisecha* (your neighbor) does not only mean Jews; it means anyone who is decent and law abiding. Any person, Jew or gentile, who operates in the world of commerce and follows guidelines set up to ensure that people do not rob, steal or cheat from each other is considered *amisecha*, and the Torah is very explicit in its warning. Do not victimize anyone who is "your fellow."

It is appropriate to quote the words of the Sefer Chassidim: "One may not do an injustice to a gentile just like a Jew, for such an act of impropriety will bring him down with no success in his endeavors. And if it doesn't happen to him, it will happen to his children!"

The Maharsha, Rav Shmuel Eidels zt'l, writes: "Many people in this generation amass great fortunes through trickery, cheating gentiles, and causing a terrible *chillul Hashem*. Then, they use that stolen money to give themselves honor, to make a grand *Mi Shebeirach* in *shul* for self-aggrandizement and glorification! This is nothing lower than a *mitzvah* obtained through a sin, and such 'wealth' will have no lasting power."

IMAGINARY ILLUSIONS

Reb Noson of Breslov

"And if you sell anything to your neighbor or purchase from your neighbor, do not cheat one another." (25:14)

All cheating results from the wiles of the imagination.

Were we to realize in our intellectual mind that we will eventually have to make an accounting to G-d, we would never allow ourselves to cheat others. But because we fall prey to our illusions, we fall into the trap of cheating others. Perhaps even worse, we cheat and fool ourselves. (Likutey Halakhot VII, p. 448)

PARTNER WISELY

Reb Noson of Breslov

"You should buy from your fellow Jew according to the number of years since the Jubilee year. He should sell to you according to the number of years of the crop." (25:15)

One should endeavor to attach himself to righteous and honest people and conduct his affairs with them alone.

This applies even - or especially - to business dealings: they should be conducted solely with honest people. (Likutey Halakhot I, p. 251a)

WE BEGIN AND HE COMPLETES

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"You should buy from your fellow Jew according to the number of years since the Jubilee year. He should sell to you according to the number of years of the crop." (25:15)

The 49-year period of seven sabbatical cycles, followed by the Jubilee year, parallels the annual 49-day period of seven weeks during which we are to count the days from Passover until the holiday of Shavuot, the annual reliving of the Giving of the Torah.

In the annual count from Passover to Shavuot, the final, 50th day is observed but not counted. This is because the annual reliving of the Giving of the Torah is a Divine revelation that we cannot attain on our own; it is a Divine gift. Similarly, the Jubilee year is observed but not counted, for the same reason. Nonetheless, the Divine revelations on both Shavuot and in the Jubilee year occur only in response to our having counted the preceding 49 days or years, respectively, through which we ascend through all the levels of Divine consciousness that we can attain on our own.

Thus, we see that with regard to fulfilling our Divine mission, Hashem grants us success beyond whatever we can accomplish ourselves - provided that we invest our maximum efforts to accomplish what we can on our own. - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

BE KIND TO YOURSELF

Rabbi Efrem Goldberg

"You shall not harass one another, and you shall fear your G-d, for I am Hashem, your G-d." (25:17)

Rashi, citing the Gemara in Maseches Bava Metzia, explains that this *pasuk* introduces the Torah prohibition of *אונאת דברים* - inflicting emotional pain through hurtful words. Several *pesukim* earlier (25:14), the Torah commands, *אל תונו איש את אחיו*, which the Gemara interprets as a reference to *אונאת ממון*, the prohibition against financial misconduct, specifically, overcharging for merchandise. Here, in the later *pasuk*, the Torah speaks of the prohibition against causing people harm with words. In colloquial terms, we might say that the Torah here forbids being obnoxious, speaking to people hurtfully and insensitively.

The Gemara gives several examples of *אונאת דברים*, including reminding people of their past mistakes, their embarrassing moments, the things that brought them shame and which they wish to forget. Reminding people of these incidents causes them to relive their embarrassment and thus experience great pain, and it is thus forbidden. Likewise, it is forbidden to take a storekeeper's time by inquiring about merchandise when one has no intention of purchasing it. Expressing interest in a product causes the proprietor aggravation when one then leaves without buying anything, and so this, too, falls under the Torah prohibition of *אונאת דברים*.

Rav Simcha Bunim of Peshischa noted the significance of the word *את* in this *pasuk*. As we know from other contexts, the word *את* is added *לרבות*, to include under the *mitzvah* something which we intuitively would not have included. We must then ask, what additional aspect of the prohibition of *אונאת דברים* is alluded to by the word *את* in this *pasuk*? What does this word indicate to us?

Rav Simcha Bunim explained that the word *את* alludes that *אונאת דברים* is forbidden not only when speaking to our fellow, but also when speaking to ourselves. Just as the Torah prohibits inflicting emotional harm on others through speech, so does it prohibit causing ourselves harm by speaking to ourselves harshly and cruelly. While we must, of course, regret our mistakes, and use the memory of our failures to propel us forward, to commit to improve, we must be very careful with the way we speak to ourselves. We must ensure not to allow ourselves to become paralyzed by our past, to wallow in guilt and shame. Just as we must refrain from putting other people down, from causing them embarrassment and anguish, so must we respect our own feelings, and ensure to speak to ourselves with sensitivity, and to never cause ourselves unnecessary anguish.

DEALING WITH KINDNESS

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

"You shall not harass one another, and you shall fear your G-d, for I am Hashem, your G-d." (25:17)

Parashas Behar begins by describing the unique laws of *shemittah* (Sabbatical year for all fields, with agricultural practices that allow the land to rest) and *yovel* (Jubilee year for all fields, when all land reverts back to original owners) (25:1-34). Nestled among the laws is the twice-mentioned precept not to wrong one another in business dealings (25:14, 17). Rashi explains that the first commandment is specific to appropriate business dealings, while the second restriction refers to verbally abusing or taking advantage of others. Why were these tenets placed in the middle of the *shemittah* and *yovel* laws?

Rav Hirsch explains that the laws of *shemittah* and *yovel* are centered around the concept that anything that occurs within a certain time frame returns to its original state, such that people revert to being equals. In contrast, taking advantage of someone monetarily or verbally abusing them implies an attitude that one is better than their peers and justified in taking advantage of their weaknesses. We are warned not to wrong another and are immediately reminded that we have a G-d, that we are more alike than we are different.

As Rabbi Yosef Levinson adds, instead of seeing faults and weaknesses in others, let us focus on their good qualities. Instead of causing pain, let us use words of encouragement. And instead of using body language to make others uncomfortable, let us consider using motions and expressions that bring happiness to others.

LESS IS MORE

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

"You shall perform My decrees, and observe My ordinances and perform them; and you shall dwell securely on the land. The land will give forth its fruit, and you will eat to satisfaction; and you will dwell securely upon it." (25:18-19)

G-d tells us to follow the rules He has set forth so that we may live on the land securely (25:18). The land will then produce fruits, and we will eat, be satisfied, and live securely (25:19). How does following the rules, including being satisfied, translate to security?

K'sav Sofer explains that being content with what we have will provide us with the ultimate satisfaction and, in turn, security. Almost right on cue, the Torah continues with a discussion about leaving the fields barren each seventh year. This mandate teaches us to put our needs into perspective and learn to need less. If we need less, we will be happy with less, and feel secure with what we are given. The Torah is suggesting a diet for the soul: eat less, need less, want less. And then before we know it, less becomes more than enough.

HARMFUL RAMIFICATIONS

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

"You shall not harass one another, and you shall fear your G-d, for I am Hashem, your G-d." (25:17)

In this *pasuk* the Torah commands us not to say anything to another Jew that will cause him emotional pain. In fact, the Chazon Ish, R' Avraham Yeshaya Karelitz zt'l, used to advise parents not to give their children unusual or strange-sounding names which others may poke fun at, so that the children should not feel pain or suffer from it when they get older!

Since verbal abuse can cause so much suffering, much care must be taken not to say things to people that will hurt their feelings. The more sensitive someone is, the greater care we must take when speaking to him that our words don't cause him pain.

R' Shlomo Kluger zt'l commented that some people are careless with the feelings of others. They believe they only have to consider *mitzvos bein adam l'Makom* - involving man's obligation to the Almighty. But the truth is that if a person is not careful with his obligations to his fellow man and hurts others with his words, he will eventually become careless with the *mitzvos* between man and the Almighty. This concept is found in the words of Chazal: "Whoever denies the favor of a friend, in the end will come to deny the favors of Hashem. And whoever is grateful for the favor of his friend, in the end will be grateful for the favors of Hashem."

Therefore, in the same *pasuk* that the Torah warns against hurting the feelings of others, the Torah adds "and you shall fear the Almighty." Failure to observe the first half of the *pasuk* will lead to failure to observe the latter half of the *pasuk*.

HOLY TRICKERY

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"You shall not harass one another, and you shall fear your G-d, for I am Hashem, your G-d." (25:17)

Allegorically, this is a warning for us not to let our bodies and animating souls deceive our Divine souls (Zohar 2:199a). Coming from its native spiritual environment, the Divine soul is at first disoriented by its sudden entrance into the physical world, experiencing the body's and animating soul's drives for material fulfillment. It is therefore at a disadvantage and can be easily tricked into thinking that it should subordinate its drive to fulfill its Divine mission to the other voices urging it to join them in the pursuit of material satisfaction and pleasure.

It is therefore our job - as parents, educators, and individuals - to ensure that the Divine soul not succumb to the deceptions of the animating soul. On the contrary, the Divine soul must learn how to "trick" the animating soul to pursue spirituality and Divinity, conscripting it to use all its powers of lust for holy ends. (Hitva'aduyot 5716, vol. 1, p. 73) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

HOW TO MAKE A BLESSING

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

"If you will say, 'What shall we eat in the seventh year? Behold, we must not sow, nor gather in our crops,' then I will ordain My blessing upon you in the sixth year, and it shall yield produce for the three years." (25:20-21)

The Gemara (Bava Kamma 30a) cites an opinion regarding the method one should use to become pious and righteous: Among other things, he should be vigilant in *mile d'brachos* - the *halachos* dealing with blessings and the manner in which one should bless Hashem. Rav Yeshayah Levy shlita offers a new understanding in this idea based on an incident that took place with Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach zt'l.

One day in early spring, R' Shlomo Zalman was walking with a *talmid* and talking in learning. The *talmid* noticed that they passed a number of trees upon which they could have recited the blessing over blossoming fruit trees that is recited in the month of Nissan. However, R' Shlomo Zalman bypassed all of them and instead paused in front of a lone blossoming tree and recited the special blessing with intense concentration.

The young man was surprised and wondered out loud why the *rav* hadn't made the blessing over a cluster of trees, which is preferable *halachically*, rather than reciting it on a single tree.

R' Shlomo Zalman smiled and said, "My son, take a good look at the tree and tell me what you see."

The young man looked closely and saw nothing out of the ordinary. "Look again," said R' Shlomo Zalman.

This time, he said, "Rebbi, all I see is a house behind the tree, and an elderly lady standing in the window watching."

"You have seen well" said R' Shlomo Zalman. "This lady is a widow who waits every year for Rabbi Auerbach, the well-known rabbi, to recite a blessing over her tree. This gives her great pleasure. How can I deny her that pleasure by making the blessing someplace else?"

What is *milei L'brachos*? It is blessing Hashem by acting with righteousness, humility and thoughtfulness toward others!

ONE WAY OR THE OTHER

Reb Zusia

"If you will say, 'What shall we eat in the seventh year? Behold, we must not sow, nor gather in our crops,' then I will ordain My blessing upon you in the sixth year, and it shall yield produce for the three years." (25:20-21)

If they will find it necessary to doubt Him and ask, "What shall we eat in the seventh year?", Hashem will have to "ordain" His blessing. If they would have had perfect faith and not questioned Him, the blessing would have come of itself.

HEARTFELT SYMPATHY

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

"If you will say, 'What shall we eat in the seventh year? Behold, we must not sow, nor gather in our crops,' then I will ordain My blessing upon you in the sixth year, and it shall yield produce for the three years." (25:20-21)

The Tzror Hamor writes that the *mitzvah* of *shemittah* and *yovel* - which required the landowners to leave their land untouched - served as a fundamental lesson to address the radical disparity between the wealthy and the poor. Because, by keeping this *mitzvah*, even those who previously led comfortable lives would in a very real way be forced to experience the concerning question of, "What will we eat?"

By creating a temporary situation where produce would become less available than before, the sensitivities of the wealthy would become heightened to the plight of those less fortunate. They would carry this empathy with them after the *shemittah* years and be more willing to help others to a much greater degree. Thus, the long-term effect of this *mitzvah* would ensure a greater balance of minds and resources among the Jewish People.

Applying this message in practical terms, Rav Chaim Volozhin would approach wealthy people in his town on behalf of the poor in the following way:

He would knock at the door and ask to speak privately to the homeowner outside. The homeowner would immediately step outside to hear the important message that the honored Rav had come to relay. Rav Chaim, however, would converse with the man, asking about his family and business. They would speak a little in learning and all the while, the homeowner would shiver from the cold.

At some point, the man would urge the Rav to come inside where it was nice and warm, but the Rav would refuse, continuing the conversation. At some point, the host would have to excuse himself while he fetched his thick coat or insisted on continuing the conversation by the fireplace. At that point, Rav Chaim would get to his point. He would tell the man that he had come to collect money for firewood for the poor. "For this we needed to stand outside?" the host would exclaim. "Yes," Rav Chaim would answer, "for now you can appreciate the difficulties that the poor find themselves in without the ability to warm their homes."

Whether it is someone seeking a contribution for his cause, an impoverished individual looking for a donation, a spouse, a child, or a friend who needs a helping hand, we are often asked to assist others. Yet, many times, even when we give them what they request, we do so without sincerity or enthusiasm. However, if we take this message to heart and mentally put ourselves in their position for a moment, we will find it much easier to sympathize with their needs which will then encourage us to lend our support with more sincerity and greater enthusiasm - leading to a more perfect *mitzvah*.

APPROACHING THE REDEMPTION

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"I will ordain My blessing upon you in the sixth year, and it shall yield produce for the three years." (25:21)

Allegorically, the six years preceding the sabbatical year are compared to the six millennia that have transpired since Creation. The sabbatical year corresponds to the seventh millennium, that of redemption. We are now in the latter part of the sixth millennium, i.e., toward the end of the sixth "year."

The future Redemption will occur in three stages:

- The first stage is the period before the advent of *Mashiach*, in which we experience a foretaste of the Redemption.
- The second stage is the period immediately after the coming of *Mashiach*, in which we will be able to fulfill Hashem's will without hindrance, but the world will still function within the limitations of nature.
- In the third stage, which begins with the Resurrection of the Dead, what we presently consider miraculous will become natural. (Ohr HaTorah, Noach, vol. 1, pp. 433-434)

In this context, Hashem's promise for the sixth year means that by dedicating ourselves to our Divine mission, we will usher in all three stages of the final Redemption. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 27, p. 190) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

When Hashem hid His presence after Adam and Eve ate the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, He limited this concealment to 6,000 years. Although we can usher it in earlier, the Messianic era will commence no later than the beginning of the seventh millennium.

The six years during which agricultural work is permitted correspond to the six millennia of the world's present state of existence. The sabbatical year corresponds to the seventh millennium, when the world will "rest" from its present state. We are now in the latter part of the sixth millennium, i.e., nearing the end of the sixth "year."

In this context, we know that the Divine consciousness and spiritual strength of our generation cannot compare to those of earlier ones. This being the case, we may wonder how it can be that the sixth "year" - the weakest one - will be the one to provide for the seventh. How can our relatively weak spirituality usher in the Redemption, when the superior spirituality of our holy ancestors did not?

To this, Hashem replies that in the merit of our simple faith - as expressed in our dedication to our Divine mission despite all obstacles and beyond the constraints of logic - He will increase the yield of the "sixth year," and bring us the Redemption. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 27, p. 190) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

GUARANTEED BLESSINGS

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

"I will ordain My blessing upon you in the sixth year, and it shall yield produce for the three years." (25:21)

Mashal: The year 5719 (1959) was a *shemittah* year and an organization, originally formed under the leadership of the great Chazon Ish zt'l years before, sprang into action. Their job was to assist and exhort every farmer in the Holy Land to observe *shemittah* and leave his field and crops unattended. Through their efforts, many farmers did keep this *mitzvah* and were sustained with all their needs for the entire year. That year, however, only one thing was missing: No matter how hard they tried, they could not procure onions! Every other fruit and vegetable was obtained in bulk quantities, except for onions, which were unattainable.

That was the case, until an abandoned cargo ship sailed into the Port of Yaffo filled almost to capacity with... onions! It turned out that this was an Egyptian vessel that inexplicably got lost. When the captain realized that he had entered Israeli waters, he panicked and ordered the crew to abandon ship. The boat came into port without a soul on board!

Nimshal: Hashem promises that if the people will keep the *mitzvah* of *shemittah*, he will ensure that they will be sustained for the entire year. These heroes will lack for nothing and even secure commodities that are normally difficult to acquire. One who trusts in Hashem will be amply rewarded.

DIVINELY BLESSED

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"If you will say, 'What shall we eat in the seventh year? Behold, we must not sow, nor gather in our crops,' then I will ordain My blessing upon you in the sixth year, and it shall yield produce for the three years." (25:20-21)

The question stated in this verse stems from the correct understanding that G-d does not promise to provide for us during the Sabbatical year in an openly miraculous manner - say, by raining down manna from heaven. No, the Sabbatical year is described in terms no more miraculous than the weekly Sabbath: We are supposed to believe that just as we can survive for seven days on the work of only six, we will somehow survive for seven years on the work of only six.

The answer to the counterintuitive nature of this commandment is equally counterintuitive: simple, supra-rational discipline (or, as it is phrased by the sages (Berachos 2:2), "acceptance of the yoke of the kingdom of heaven"). In other words, it is the merit of observing this commandment despite its seeming illogic that earns us G-d's hidden but still miraculous intervention, making the produce of the sixth year sufficiently abundant to provide for our needs during the Sabbatical year.

In this sense, the commandment of the Sabbatical year is the archetype for all G-d's commandments: fulfilling them with pure and absolute commitment ensures us of Divinely-assisted success in all our endeavors. - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniefsky

SIMPLY UNREFUTABLE

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

"I will ordain My blessing upon you in the sixth year, and it shall yield produce for the three years." (25:21)

After being dragged to the event by his friend who had just started to study in Aish HaTorah, Jay (not his real name) found himself sitting in an Aish HaTorah Discovery Seminar listening to the Rabbi give a very convincing and rational lecture on "The proofs of Hashem's existence."

Throughout the Seminar, Jay argued with the Rabbi, but each time Jay was forced to submit to the Rabbi's convincing arguments.

One of the final deliveries in the seminar proving that Hashem gave the Torah and that it was not written by man is found in the verse quoted above.

The Rabbi translated the verse and asked the following question, If Hashem was not the One Who wrote the Torah, and rather it was indeed a mere mortal who had written it - he was obviously driven by the goal of convincing people to live by his "religion." If so, why would he write this verse?

Why would he ever allow himself to be tested like this, to be held up to such scrutiny? To promise that everyone who keeps the *Shemittah* Sabbatical Year will be blessed with three years' worth of crop is nothing short of a miracle, a promise that a mere mortal could never hope to deliver and would therefore never risk promising in the first place. If it was not Hashem who wrote this line, how long do you think that such a religion would realistically last before being exposed as a fraud?"

Jay's friend put up his hand, "Six years" he shouted.

"Correct" said the Rabbi. "Yet Judaism is the oldest religion in the world with a Torah that has been followed for thousands of years. Surely if the Torah was written by a man - even an absolute genius, we would have proved it wrong long ago." the Rabbi concluded.

The room was stunned. After hearing different approaches to show that Hashem created the world and had written the Torah, no one had anything left to say - they were all simply amazed. Everyone apart from Jay that is. He stood up and declared with a triumphant voice "Rabbi. Thank you for presenting us with all of this today. Throughout your presentations you satisfactorily answered every one of my questions, and I could not answer back. In fact, as time went on, I became convinced that you were right. Maybe I should enroll in a Yeshiva to find out more, I started to think. But then I stopped myself, because I have one last argument that I know you won't be able to disprove" he said, pausing dramatically.

"You see, after hearing your evidence, I agree that man could not have written the Torah, or created the world with everything in it, or sustain its existence today. But maybe it was aliens?" he said in all seriousness, looking around the room for support.

The Rabbi was slightly taken aback, but with a big smile on his face he immediately answered, "You know, you're right. I can't categorically disprove that. But I will tell you one thing, if a group of aliens came and created the world; if they created everything in it from my eye with its millions of sensory nerve cells to the highest mountains. If they can maintain the distance of the earth from the sun at exactly the right amount that it should not freeze or burn up. And if they come and write a Torah that guarantees a blessing to anyone who keeps the *Shemittah*, and then they tell me to keep Shabbos. then I'm gonna keep Shabbos!" Jay was stunned. He sat down, thought about it for a few moments and then said, "Ok. Where do I sign up for Yeshiva?"

STRANGERS AND SETTLERS

Dubno Maggid

"...for you are strangers and settlers with Me." (25:23)

Hashem said to the Jewish People: The relationship between you and Me is always that of "strangers and settlers." If you'll live in the world like strangers, remembering that you are here only temporarily, then I will be a settler in your midst in that My Presence will dwell with you permanently. But if you regard yourselves as settlers, as permanent owners of the land on which you live when the land is actually not yours but Mine, My Presence will be a stranger in that it will not dwell in your midst. In any case, you, O Israel, and I cannot be strangers and settlers at the same time. If you act the stranger, then I will be the settler, and if you act the settler, I must be the stranger.

TEMPORARY DWELLING

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"...his redeemer [of the field] who is closest to him may come forth and redeem his brother's sale." (25:25)

The laws of redeeming land prior to the Jubilee year are based on the principle given two verses ago (Vayikra 25:23): "The land must not be sold [in such a way as] to sever it [permanently from its original owner], for the land belongs to Me." The prohibition of a permanent sale reminds us that the land ultimately belongs to Hashem; we should never consider ourselves its true owners.

The same applies to whatever wealth or property we may accrue during our lifetimes. "The earth and its fullness are Hashem's" (Tehillim 24:1). We should never lose sight of the fact that Hashem has given us whatever we possess only as His partners, in order to refine it, elevate it, and transform it into His true home. (Hitva'aduyot 5745, vol. 4, pp. 2077-2079) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniefsky

IT GOES BOTH WAYS

Rabbi Abraham Zelmans of Warsaw

"If your brother becomes impoverished and his hand falters among you, you must support him..." (25:35)

A Rav was asked whether one may take a loan of money when one knows that, in the normal course of events, he would not be able to repay the loan but has faith that Hashem will help him clear the debt.

"You may," the sage replied, "provided that you yourself would be willing to lend money to a person who lacks the means to repay the loan because you are confident that the person's faith in Hashem's eventual help will be rewarded. But if you are unwilling to lend money to a person with only the person's faith as collateral, you, too, must not borrow money under such conditions."

IT PAYS TO GIVE

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

"If your brother becomes impoverished and his hand falters among you, you must support him..." (25:35)

Mashal: R' Yaakov Krantz zt'l (Maggid of Dubno) once told a man who refused to give *tzedakah*, "You will certainly gain entry into *Olam Haba*."

"Why?" asked the miser curiously. "Because I didn't give you a donation for charity, I now merit the World to Come?!"

"Let me explain," said the Maggid. "There was once a wealthy man who didn't give charity all his life. Before he died, he had his servants gather his valuables to be buried with him. When he reached the Heavenly Gates, he was required to explain his selfish behavior."

"I didn't give *tzedakah*," the man said, "because in the world of deceit that I just left, I could never know who was truly needy and who was just lazy. So I brought all my money with me to this world, where truth reigns, so that I could give out money here!"

"The Heavenly court took this claim seriously. After much deliberation, they decided that if they'd find two other people who had also done this, the miser could enter *Olam Haba*. They searched all over, but could come up with only one other person; Korach, who was buried with all his money."

The Maggid concluded, "The two are waiting impatiently for another rich man with the same excuse, for then there will be three: Korach, the man from the story - and you! So, you will certainly be allowed into the World to Come!"

Nimshal: The Torah tells us that not only must we give charity to needy individuals, we must also look out for our unfortunate brethren and give them *chizuk* (strength) during difficult periods. This way, we not only help them financially, we give them life - emotionally, physically, and spiritually. "*V'chai achicha emach*" - We allow them life and prosperity amongst us.

FEELING THEIR PAIN

Rabbi Efrem Goldberg

"If your brother becomes impoverished and his hand falters among you, you must support him – proselyte and resident – so that he can live with you." (25:35)

The Torah here speaks of a situation where a fellow Jew struggles financially, and "his situation becomes unstable among you." We are required to do what he can to help our struggling fellow regain his financial footing.

Rav Simcha Bunim Sofer, in *Sheivet Sofer*, offers a different reading of this *pasuk*, suggesting that the words *ומטה ידו עמך* are not part of the Torah's description of the struggling individual's plight, but rather the first instruction given to others for how to respond.

When our fellow Jew is struggling, we must feel the pain as though it is ours. *ומטה ידו עמך* means that his struggles must be "with us"; they need to become our struggles. His plight is our plight; his challenges are our challenges; his problem is our problem that we must try to solve as best we can.

This means that when a fellow Jew is in crisis, we must react not with sympathy, but rather with empathy. Rather than simply "feel bad" and pity the person, we must feel that this is our crisis, too, one which we must work to resolve.

The *Sheivet Sofer* cites in this context the Gemara's teaching in *Maseches Berachos* (6b), *איגרא דתעניתא צדקתא* - the primary reward that we receive for observing a fast is not for the fast itself, but for the charity that is customarily given at the end of the fast. (The *Mishna Berura* writes that it is proper on a fast day to donate to charity the value of the amount of food which one eats on a normal day, and which one has thus saved by fasting.) The *tzedakah* which one gives at the end of a fast day, on an empty stomach, is given with empathy, rather than sympathy.

The *Sheivet Sofer* explains that when we feel famished and weary in the afternoon of a *taanis*, we understand more keenly the suffering of the poor, what it means not to have sufficient food.

The *tzedakah* is given out of a real sense of what the recipient is going through, and this is why it is so significant and earns us great rewards.

We've all endured hardships in life. Some have gone through medical problems; others have faced financial struggles, mental health issues, difficulties finding a marriage partner, fertility problems, or challenges with children. We are to use these experiences to feel empathy for those facing similar struggles.

When we see people dealing with the same painful challenges that we had, we must feel their pain, empathize with them, understand just how difficult their plight is, and this will motivate us to do everything we can to help.

JEWISH SELF-CARE

Rabbi Aryeh Dachs

"If your brother becomes impoverished and his hand falters among you, you must support him..." (25:35)

"Self-care" was once a term confined to hippy-ish yoga and meditation people. Now, it has been adopted to the mainstream audience and marketing agencies use it comfortably when selling a wide spectrum of products. Both eating healthfully and indulgently are sold as "self-care." Exercising or not exercising are also both self-care. Either way, whatever it is, it is quite popular. I once read that self-care is reportedly a ten-billion-dollar industry. One thing is clear, the idea that we can and should give to ourselves is attractive. Is that a Torah idea?

The Midrash in Parashas Behar discusses the *mitzvah* to support those who struggle financially. The Midrash comments on the verse (25:35) that obligates us to give *tzedakah*, which states, "*Ve'chi yamuch achicha u'matah yado imach* - When your brother becomes impoverished, and his hand falters, with you [in your vicinity]." The need for the last word of the verse, "*imach* - with you," is puzzling.

The Midrash tells of Hillel the Elder, who understood the word "*imach*" quite literally; in your vicinity, meaning yourself! The Midrash begins with the verse (Mishlei 11:17), "*Gomel nafsho ish chessed*," which can be translated as "A kind man gives to himself." The Midrash (Vayikra Rabbah 34:3) explains that this verse refers to Hillel the Elder, and relates the following incident: Hillel hurriedly departed from his students, apparently on a serious mission. His students asked him where he was headed. He explained that he was headed to do a *mitzvah*. They inquired further, "Which *mitzvah*? [Perhaps we could join?]" Hillel told them he was headed to the bathhouse to wash himself. The students were astounded, "Is this a *mitzvah*?" Hillel replied, "Those who care for the great statues of the kings of Rome housed in the theaters and circuses are not only paid but held in high regard for doing so; certainly, we, created in the image of G-d - *b'tzelem Elokim* - are required to treat ourselves in that way."

I heard a talk from my teacher Rabbi Yehudah Shmidman, where he made an interesting observation. The Midrash uses the words in the verse "*gomel nafsho*," giving to himself, as an accurate description for Hillel's view. The Midrash clearly understands that Hillel viewed his trip to the bathhouse as a legitimate act of kindness, even though he was giving it to himself.

We are a kind, compassionate people. We can fixate on our Torah obligation to give and help others without ever thinking about our responsibility to care for ourselves. Our physical being requires constant maintenance. To survive, we need to eat, sleep, clothe ourselves, and bathe. Hillel taught us that we can and should transform our duty to care for ourselves into an act of kindness; a kindness to a being that is a *tzelem Elokim*, created in the image of the Almighty.

The Torah view of "self-care" is more of a paradigm shift than anything else. Caring for ourselves is not a chore to be derided or dismissed. We don't dismiss our obligation to provide for our children or our drive to give to our friends and community. We don't do this because we recognize their inherent value and prestige. We give to ourselves, all day; we also have inherent value and prestige! By providing for our own physical needs, we are doing our part to sustain a very important entity.

PROTECTED BY GIVING

Dubno Maggid

"If your brother becomes impoverished and his hand falters among you, you must support him..." (25:35)

Of this it is written (Tehillim 41:2), "Blessed be he who gives understanding care to the poor; Hashem will deliver him in the day of evil." (Midrash)

At the beginning of each year, it is decreed for each person how much financial loss one will suffer in the year to come. People who are wise will give the money they would be destined to lose to the poor. In that case, it won't be a loss at all but a gain in that each person will receive credit for having done a good deed. But if people will not give money to the poor, the money they are destined to lose will be taken from them in less pleasant circumstances.

The thought conveyed by the Midrashic text is as follows: If one is sufficiently wise to support the poor, "Hashem will deliver him on the day of evil"; that is, on the day when it was intended, Heaven forbid, that evil should befall him, Hashem will deliver him because he has already given away what he was destined to lose. But if he was not wise enough to give some of his money to the poor, he will have to give it away "in the day of evil" and nothing will be able to save him from that fate.

MAINTAINING THEIR DIGNITY

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

"If your brother becomes impoverished and his hand falters among you, you must support him..." (25:35)

The Yerushalmi in Maseches Orlah teaches us a fascinating botanical phenomenon that also gives us great insight into human nature.

It states that when a small plant is grafted onto a tree, if the plant is taking all of its nutrients and nourishment from the older tree, then the laws of *orlah* do not apply. But if the plant is self-sustaining and does not derive its sustenance from the tree, then the laws of *orlah* do apply and this grafted plant cannot be used for three years.

How can one determine its source of nourishment? If the plant receives its sustenance from the big tree, its leaves will all turn away from the tree. The Yerushalmi explains that this is because it is embarrassed to be supported by others.

This Yerushalmi helps us understand the explanation of the Cheishev Sofer, Rav Avraham Shmuel Binyamin Sofer zt'l (great-grandson of the Chasam Sofer), on the words of the above *pasuk*.

Chazal teach us (Bava Basra 9b) that one who gives a poor person money receives six blessings, and one who speaks to a poor man with kindness and warmth receives eleven blessings. This is because showing kindness to a poor man is the biggest *chessed* one can do for him. By just handing him money, the poor man is made to feel embarrassed and inferior, and (in most cases) finds it difficult to look his benefactor in the face. For this reason, the Torah is adamant that if one's brother becomes poor he should help him out, but do it in a way that the pauper can still face him and not be embarrassed to be in his presence.

SOLID INVESTMENT

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"You must not take interest..." (25:36)

The crucial difference between interest-bearing loans (which are forbidden) and investments (which are permitted) is that interest is a reward for a past deed: the one-time act of giving the loan. In contrast, a return on an investment is a reward for the ongoing involvement that continues throughout the life of the investment.

In this sense, charging interest is fundamentally opposed to how Hashem is involved in our lives. Hashem does not "loan" us the powers that He grants us, as a one-time act; He "invests" them in us, remaining constantly and intimately involved in helping us reap the rewards of our efforts.

Hashem behaves toward us in the same way that we behave toward our fellows. Thus, when someone charges interest, Hashem responds in kind: He grants him the initial potential but refrains from extending him ongoing supernatural assistance. When we forego interest on our loans, Hashem also responds in kind: He not only grants us the initial potential to be successful both materially and spiritually but continues to assist us throughout our labors. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 3, pp. 1007-1012) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniefsky

There is a subtle yet crucial difference between an investor profiting from his investment and a lender profiting from a loan. When we invest in a financial venture, the invested money still belongs to us; thus, our money is "working" for us. We have therefore earned the profit that the venture returns. In contrast, a loan transfers ownership of the principal to the borrower; the money now belongs to the borrower, even though he is obligated to repay it later. Thus, taking interest on a loan is profiting from someone else's effort without having participated in that effort. The lender is collecting interest based only upon the fact that the money used to belong to him.

Taking interest on a loan to a compatriot is therefore opposed to the way Hashem wants the world to operate. Hashem intended that we refine ourselves by working for our achievements, both spiritual and material. In the words of the Sages (Megillah 6b), "If someone says to you, 'I have toiled without results,' do not believe him. If he says, 'I have not toiled, but have nonetheless seen results,' do not believe him either. Only if he says, 'I have toiled and seen results,' believe him." (Likutei Sichot, vol. 3, pp. 1007-1012) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniefsky

PATIENCE IS A VIRTUE

Reb Noson of Breslov

"You must not take interest..." (25:36)

"Observe the commandments, the statutes and the laws that I am commanding you today, to do them" (Devarim 7:11). "Today, to do them" - and tomorrow, in the World to Come, to receive the reward for them. (Rashi)

One can expect reward for his *mitzvos*, but he must exercise patience for what is coming to him. He must have faith in the enduring reward of the World to Come without collecting a temporary reward here in this world. For in truth, time does not really exist. The life of this world is fleeting, while the main life is the eternal life that transcends all concepts of time.

The prohibition against charging interest reflects this understanding. Interest is money one receives while he waits for the repayment of his money. It is as if he collects his reward now; he lacks the faith to wait for the proper moment. (Likutei Halakhos IV, p. 192a)

RESPECT THE RECIPIENT

Rabbi Efrem Goldberg

"...and let your brother live with you." (25:36)

The Torah commands that if our fellow falls into financial straits, we are obligated to offer assistance, so that **וְחַי אִתּוֹ** - "your brother shall live with you" (25:36).

Rav Yisroel Meir Druck, in *Lahavos Eish*, explains this phrase based on an insight by the Vilna Gaon, distinguishing between the words **עִמּוֹ** and **אִתּוֹ**. When a person is with someone else, he can be said to be **עִמּוֹ** or **אִתּוֹ**. These words, at first glance, appear to mean the same thing, but the Gaon noted that they actually denote two different types of "togetherness." The word **עִמּוֹ**, the Gaon explained, implies that the people are not only in close physical proximity to one another, but also joined by a shared goal and purpose. By contrast, **אִתּוֹ** connotes physical proximity, but without a common objective.

The Gaon offers on this basis an answer to the well-known question of why G-d became angry with Bilam when he joined Balak's emissaries who summoned him to place a curse on *Bnei Yisrael* (ויחר אף אלוקים כי הולך הוא) - *Bamidbar* 22:22).

G-d had just appeared to Bilam the night before to give His consent for Bilam's journey to Moav (קום לך איתם - ibid. 22:20). Why, then, was He now angry? The Gaon explains that G-d had said, קום לך איתם - but Bilam then traveled עם שרי מואב (22:21). G-d approved of Bilam's joining Balak's officers, but not with the same plan that they had - to destroy *Bnei Yisrael*. Bilam went עם שרי מואב, with the same intentions and mindset as them, which G-d did not want him to do.

Returning to Parshas Behar, Rav Druck suggests that in commanding וחי אחיך עמך, the Torah is instructing a person how to perceive the recipient whom he helps with his generous donation. It might feel natural for the benefactor to assume a condescending posture toward the beneficiary, to feel superior to him. The Torah therefore commands, וחי אחיך עמך - that the donor is to see himself and the recipient as brothers, as equals. Hashem gives a person extra money so that he will give a portion to the needy on his behalf. He is no better than the recipient; the money in his account already belongs to the pauper, and he is simply handing it to him like the clerk at the bank. We should never look down on those whom we help, because by helping them, we are simply doing the job we were given, delivering the resources that were entrusted with us to their rightful owners. When we give *tzedakah*, we are to do so with genuine feelings of respect for the recipient, viewing him as our equal, and not as someone who is in any way inferior to us.

UNITY IN CHARITY

Rabbi Aryeh Dachs

"I am Hashem, your G-d, Who took you out of the land of Egypt, to give you the land of Canaan, to be for you a G-d." (25:38)

I once read an excerpt from a talk given by Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik where he contrasts the root of the word *charity* with the root of the Jewish word *tzedakah*. Charity is derived from the Latin word *caritas*, loving-kindness. Whereas *tzedakah* is derived from *tzedek*, justice. His point is that a Jew is obligated to give because he understands that money is directly apportioned by G-d. A Jew who has the means has a great responsibility to administer that money the right way. The luminous medieval Italian scholar, Rabbi Ovadia Seforno, offers a unique lens to better understand this responsibility.

One of the primary sources for the *mitzvah* of *tzedakah* is in Parshas Behar. The Torah describes an unfortunate common occurrence where a member of the community is *yamuch* - reduced, financially at risk. The Torah directs us to help this individual get back on his feet by providing him with charity and free loans. The Torah then concludes with a verse that addresses the entire community: "I am Hashem, your G-d, Who has taken you [*eschem*] out of Egypt... to be for you [*lachem*] a G-d." Why does the Torah specifically invoke our national commitment to Hashem here, by the *mitzvah* of *tzedakah*?

It seems that the *mitzvah* of *tzedakah* is somehow linked to our nationhood and our national commitment to Hashem. This act of *tzedakah* contributes to making Hashem "Our G-d."

The Seforno explains that the purpose of this concluding verse is to link our communal acceptance of Hashem and commitment to Him as our G-d with our obligation to help our fellow in need. He explains that the ideals of the Torah cannot be attained by individuals alone. Rather, the "mission" of the Torah is designed to be fulfilled communally and correctly, by all of us - together. With this in mind, we can see a clear link between our glorious national mission and the *mitzvah* of *tzedakah*. The more we foster our sense of a unified community fulfilling a unified mission, the more apparent our responsibility to commit to take care of the entire community becomes.

The *mitzvah* of *tzedakah* allows us to become more sensitive and benevolent; it humbles us and creates real value in the money with which we are blessed. This Seforno brings to light an entirely new perspective on our obligation to assist the needy. The Jewish nation is one unit tasked with one goal: to fulfill G-d's purpose of Creation. When a member of our community is in difficult straits, our mission is jeopardized. With this in mind, we can see a clear link between our glorious national mission and the *mitzvah* of *tzedakah*. *Tzedakah* transcends the individual mandate to give. We have a responsibility to ensure that every Jew is well suited to perform their duties. To achieve our national mission and indeed make Hashem our G-d, we need to ensure everyone in our community is taken care of.

JOURNEY TOWARDS FREEDOM

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

"If your brother becomes impoverished with you and is sold to you, you shall not work him with slave labor." (25:39)

If a fellow Jew becomes desperate enough to become a slave, we are commanded not to work him with slave labor (25:39). If having a Jewish slave does not allow them to be treated as such, why does the option even exist? Also, as a nation that knows firsthand the horrors of slavery, why does the concept of slavery even exist in Judaism?

The Rambam explains that all processes in nature are gradual and that it would be impossible to suddenly discontinue things that the world was accustomed to. Instead, G-d limited and humanized the practice until humankind would decide to abolish slavery of their own volition. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks submits that this was done by changing slavery from a condition to a circumstance, from what I am to a situation in which I find myself now, but not forever. If someone was reduced to slavery, it was a temporary situation, not an identity. The depth of our history gives us the perspective to acknowledge and value the freedoms we have today.

FROM SERVANT TO SON

Reb Noson of Breslov

"For they are My servants whom I took out of the land of Egypt. They must not be sold in the manner of slaves." (25:42)

Sometimes the Torah refers to the Jewish people as Hashem's servants; other times they are referred to as Hashem's sons - e.g., "My firstborn son, Israel" (Shemos 4:22), and "You are sons to Hashem your Lord" (Devarim 14:1). One level leads to the next. A person cannot truly attain the level of "son" unless he first passes through the level of "servant." First he must serve Hashem as a servant would his master, without always knowing why or for what purpose. If he persists, he will eventually experience the true satisfaction of serving Hashem, and rejoice in it as a son who willingly serves his father. (Likutey Halachot I, p. 116a)

WORTH THE INVESTMENT

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"Do not subjugate him through hard labor..." (25:43)

Working without purpose is demoralizing and can even drive a person insane, whereas working for a constructive purpose - even if the task requires great effort - is richly rewarding. The satisfaction that results from accomplishment can be greater even than the satisfaction from the actual wages.

The efforts we are required to expend in studying the Torah and fulfilling Hashem's commandments may be great, but we have been taught that our efforts here below have profound influence on the cosmic realm above. Keeping this knowledge in mind enables us to study the Torah and fulfill Hashem's commandments with enthusiasm, joy, and purpose. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 3, p. 1010) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

WE'RE ALMOST THERE

Rabbi Jeremy Finn

"He shall calculate with his purchaser from the year of his being sold to him until the Yovel year." (25:50)

When a non-Jew acquires a Jew as an *eved*, he pays the purchase price, and the Jew is his until *Yovel*. When the Jew's family wants to redeem their relative, the redemption price is commensurate with the time left to his servitude. The closer the redemption is to *Yovel*, the less there will be to pay to redeem the Jew, and the longer there is until *Yovel*, the more expensive his redemption.

Therefore, if the non-Jew bought the *eved* fifty years before *Yovel* and paid fifty shekels for his labor, then this works out at one shekel a year until *Yovel*. Thus, if we redeem him with forty-five years left to *Yovel*, we would need to pay the master forty-five shekels for the Jew's redemption, whereas if we redeem him five years before *Yovel*, we would only need to pay five shekels.

The Chafetz Chaim used this concept to answer a question about bringing *Mashiach*.

If the *tzaddikim* of previous generations, who were on a higher spiritual level than we are today, were unable to bring *Mashiach*, what chance does our generation have of bringing him?

If the great Tanna'im, Amora'im, Geonim, Rishonim, and Acharonim did not manage to bring *Mashiach*, do we genuinely think that we can?

The Chafetz Chaim explained that Hashem has a fixed time as to when *Mashiach* will come. In order to bring *Mashiach* early, we must perform many good deeds and learn Torah. The further away we are from the intended date, the more Torah and *maasim tovim* we need to make *Mashiach's* arrival immanent. The closer we get to that date, however, the closer we are to the time when *Mashiach* MUST arrive, so the less Torah and *maasim tovim* we need to plug the gap.

We are in the *ikvesa d'Meshicha*... we can hear the footsteps of *Mashiach*... he is around the corner... he is banging on the door... he's urging us to open it and let him in! If he is so near, the amount of Torah and *maasim tovim* needed to open that door is much less than in previous generations, and therefore, we can and must do everything in our ability and on our level to bring him. (Taam V'Daas, p. 166)

SHABBOS FREEDOM

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"[The relatives of the servant must redeem him] because the Children of Israel are slaves to Me, they are my slaves, whom I have taken out of the land of Egypt - I am Hashem, your G-d." (25:55)

Some of us are so absorbed in our work during the six days of the workweek that it seems as if we have become slaves to it. Even on the Shabbat - the weekly "seventh year," on which we are supposed to "go free" - it is hard to free ourselves from the grip in which our work holds us.

The Torah teaches us that this is not the right way to live. We were created to serve Hashem: to study His Torah and to fulfill His commandments. Since Hashem created us for this purpose, He has surely provided us with the ability to fulfill it.

Even when we work during the week, we must not consider ourselves enslaved to our work; rather, we should work in order to use the fruits of our labors for holy purposes. And on the Shabbat, we should rise completely above any association with our mundane lives.

By thus liberating ourselves from our personal enslavement, we hasten the general Redemption, when the whole world will be free to pursue spirituality and Divinity unhindered. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 11, pp. 97-98) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

RESPECTING OUR IDEALS

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“My sanctuary shall you revere – I am Hashem.” (26:2)

The essence both of the Tabernacle that accompanied the Jewish people through the desert and of its successor, the holy Temple in Jerusalem, is the notion that G-d’s presence should be felt in our physical world. The “fear of the sanctuary” that G-d requires of us is the respect that we should give to this ideal.

The Torah is G-d’s plan and dream for the world, describing how we can indeed come to feel His presence in our lives. Thus, it is by studying the Torah that this notion becomes important to us and we begin to respect it. This is why the innermost chamber of the Tabernacle (and subsequently, of the Temple) housed the Tablets of the Covenant, which embodied the entire Torah.

Respect for the ideal represented by the Sanctuary inspires us to conduct our personal lives in accordance with the Torah’s instructions, as well as to influence society, as best we can, to adopt this ideal as its own. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 16, pp. 307-308) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

HAFTORAH

THE TRUE JUDGE

Mahara Yitzchaki

“Great of counsel and powerful in action, Whose eyes are cognizant of all the ways of humankind, to give everyone according to their ways and the fruit of their deeds.” (Yirmiyahu 32:19)

If someone commits a transgression that makes him liable to the death penalty by the hand of Heaven, Hashem, before passing sentence, also takes into account the man’s parents, his wife, his children and other relatives who are innocent and would be caused intense suffering if the punishment were to be carried out. Hence, Hashem does not mete out punishment before making certain that none of the relatives of the accused will suffer more anguish than he deserves.

“Great of counsel and powerful in action”: You alone, O Lord, are so brilliant in wisdom and in the ability to determine when You are about to punish - “to give everyone according to their ways and the fruit of their deeds” that none of the individuals concerned should be given more suffering than he deserves.

Rabbi Alexander Zusia Friedman adds: Rabbi Simchah Bunim of Pshischa had the following interpretation for Tehillim 19:10, “the judgments of Hashem are true and righteous altogether”: Hashem’s judgments are true in that they are righteous for all those concerned together, even for the family and relatives of the condemned. Hashem’s judgment takes their sorrow into account and is righteous to them all.