

# SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

## BEHAR-BEHUKOTAI

Haftarah: Yirmiyahu 16:19 - 17:14  
Happy Birthday Moses

MAY 4, 2013 24 IYAR 5773

Day 39 of the Omer - Rosh Hodesh Sivan will be celebrated on Friday, May10.

### NCSY Shabbaton

We welcome NCSY to our synagogue this Shabbat and look forward to an uplifting Shabbaton, "Friday Night Live" and other exciting sessions. Thank you to all our hosts and sponsors, especially to our young volunteer who wants no credit for all her hard work, and behind the scenes efforts to make this happen.

**DEDICATIONS:** In Memory of Gloria Erani - Gloria bat Rachel

The Sephardic Congregation of Long Beach - Benai Asher is having an emergency meeting of members this Sunday morning, May 5th at 10AM sharp concluding at 11AM. Rabbi David Bibi would like to give the membership insight into how the hurricane has affected the Synagogue financially and take a look forward to our future fiscally, communally and spiritually. Please try to attend.

**Friday Night: Candles: 7:35 PM - Afternoon and Evening service (Minha/Arbith): 7:00 PM**

**Morning Service (Shaharith): 9:00AM –Please say Shemah at home by 8:35 AM**

11:00 - 12:00 Orah's will be here with our Shabbat Morning Kids Program upstairs in the Rabbi's study. Stories, Tefillah, Games, Snacks and more . . . And Leah Colish will be babysitting down in the playground

**KIDDUSH SPONSORS:** Kiddush this week sponsored by Elsa and Boris Farbiarz to commemorate the yehrtzeit of Elsa's parents Albert and Sarah Arditti and by Barbara Levy to commemorate the yehrtzeit of her husband son Shlomo and Yaakov Levy. And by Moses Bibi in memory of his grandfather, Jerry Werman

5:30 - Mincha Shabbat Afternoon Oneg with Rabbi Yosef and Leah; Treats, Stories, Basketball, Hula-hoop, Parsha Quiz, Tefillot, Raffles and Fun! Supervised play during Seudat Shelishit.

5:30: Ladies Torah Class at the Lemberger's 1 East Olive.

Pirkei Avot 6:30 with Rabbi Aharon

Minha: 7:00 PM –

Seudah Shelishi and a Class 7:30 – with Rabbi David –

Seudah Shelishi co-sponsored by The Austin Family in honor of the Shetrits return to Long Beach  
Evening Service (Arbith): 8:25 PM - Shabbat Ends: 8:35PM

### WEEKDAY TEFILLA SCHEDULE

Shaharit Sunday 8:00, Mon-Fri at 7:00 (6:55 Mondays and Thursdays)

### WEEKDAY TORAH CLASS SCHEDULE

Daily 6:30 AM class – Honest Business Practices

Monday Night Class with Rabba Yanai – 7PM Monday night

LADIES: Wednesday Night 8PM with Esther Wein at various homes – please speak with Tina

### Financial Peace University

Special Series of Classes with Rabbi Colish based on Dave Ramsey's Financial Peace University. Many Rabbis have suggested this program for the community. This isn't your typical "money class." Financial Peace University is practical, entertaining and fun! **FIRST CLASS** Tuesday May 7th 8 PM - If you are still deciding if you should join us, you are welcome to come to the first class free of charge. The cost of the course is \$95 for a 9 week course. Any questions – please call Rabbi Yosef Colish - 516-589-6102)

**ADDITIONAL ANNOUNCEMENTS CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**

**Sephardic Congregation Notes Continued**

**Mazal tov to Jesse Alpern, son of Carol and Michael Alpern on his engagement to Erika Velazquez, daughter of Nina and Russell Velazquez of Riverdale, NY.**

**Mazal Tov to Karen Sutton who is receiving an award this Sunday from the Association of Orthodox Jewish Teachers, in Brooklyn**

**The sisterhood will once again sponsor lunch the second day of shavuoth. Anyone who can help with the preparations and setup please speak with Rebitzan Ida, Tina or Patti**

**SHAVUOT TENTATIVE SCHEDULE**

**Tuesday, May 14th Erev Shavuot  
Candle Lighting 7:46 pm  
Mincha 7:00 pm**

**Tikkun Leil Shavuot 11:45 pm  
All night learning with  
Rabbi David Bibi and Rabbi Aharon Seigel  
Rabbi Yosef Colish and Rabbi Michel Wagner  
Please let us know if you will be learning with us  
followed by Vatikin Minyan at 4:45 am  
Sunrise and Amidah at 5:38**

**Wednesday, May 15th First Day of Shavuot  
Shaharit 9:00 am  
We need a commitment of ten guys for regular minyan  
Tefilot and Torah Reading by  
Na'im Zemirot Yisrael – Uri Lemberger**

**Mincha 7:30 pm  
Followed by Azharot and Megilat Ruth Part 1  
Candles after 8:52 pm**

**Thursday, May 16th Second Day Shavuot  
Shaharit 9:00 am  
Megillat Ruth  
Yizkor 11:00 am  
Mincha 7:30 pm  
Followed by Azharot and Megilat Ruth Part 2  
And a Class  
Arbit at 8:35  
Havdalah – Holiday Ends 8:47 pm**

**Editors Notes**

Earlier this week I was at my desk in the office wondering what to write about for the newsletter and someone suggested the number 7. The first portion we read this week, Behar, focuses primarily on the Shemita or the Sabbatical seventh year and the Yovel which is the completion of seven cycles of seven. And we approach very soon, the holiday of Shavuot or weeks, which counts seven times seven weeks.

Earlier this year, we wrote about the 7 day week that has become pretty much universal. While we understand a day, a month and even a year based on nature and astrological influences, there is no natural reason for a seven day week. So we must accept it as biblical in origin where G-d commands us that 6 days we should work and the seventh we rest.

There are a number of biblical cycles of time which grow out of the 6 and 1 days becoming 7. We are currently counting seven weeks of the Omer, each night mentioning not only the day but the week as well. We also count seven months around the Shalosh Regalim, the holidays. Passover is in the first biblical month of Nisan and Sukkot completes the cycle in Tishrei which is the 7<sup>th</sup> month in the cycle. And if we begin in Tishrei we count seven to Nissan.

We count 6 years and the seventh year is the Sabbatical year. Then seven times seven years culminates in the 50<sup>th</sup> year called the Yovel.

We also count millennia, six thousand years of this stage of history which culminates in a seventh millennia which will be the messianic era. We learn this from the first verse in the Torah which includes the letter Aleph – 6 times. History will be 6 times Eleph or 6 times a thousand and the 7<sup>th</sup> will be beyond history. We call this messianic era – A day which is completely Shabbat. Just as the 7<sup>th</sup> day is Shabbat, so will the 7<sup>th</sup> millennia be a time period of Shabbat.

Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan writes about a concept of time called Sabbaticals of creation based on Sefer Yesirah – the book of formation we attribute to Abraham. These are Jubilees of 49,000 years. This is also found in a book called Sefer Temurah, See post script below for some interesting time calculations.

Rabbi Abittan z'sl often spoke about the number 7 representing completion in nature. Some examples he would give are direction. We know of north, south, east, west, up and down and often forget the seventh – that being where I am standing now or my

central point of reference. Similarly a box has six sides with the seventh being the interior. Another was the Magen David or the Star of David (which I don't think had much to do with David). It is made of two interlocking triangles of six points which surround a central Hexagon with the seventh point being the center. And finally the Menorah (which I do believe was the symbol on David's shield possibly using Psalm 67 as we have in the siddur as his symbol). The Menorah includes a central shaft with three arms on each side – 6 and one. The center represents Shabbat. The three days before and the three days afterwards are energized by the Shabbat. We start preparing from Wednesday for Shabbat and we can say Havdalah through Tuesday. Our world revolves around Shabbat. Our world revolves around the 7.

Rabbi Shraga Simmons notes that the fact that the Torah begins with a verse containing 7 words and 28 letters (divisible by 7) is hardly remarkable. But when placed within the context of the overwhelming number of associations in Judaism with '7', a fascinating tapestry begins to unfurl.

Rabbi Simmons continues, in honor of our own completion of the 49 day period leading up to Shavuot, we present 49 allusions to the number "7" within Judaism. How many of these do you recognize? How many more can you add?

1. Shabbat is the 7th day of the week.
2. There are 7 weeks in the counting of the Omer before Shavuot. (Leviticus 23:15)
3. In Israel, there are 7 days of Passover and Sukkot. (Leviticus 23:6, 34)
4. Every 7th year, the land lays fallow during Shmita (Sabbatical year). (Leviticus 25:4)
5. After 7 cycles of Shmita, we have a Jubilee year (Yovel). (Leviticus 25:8)
6. When a close relative dies, we sit Shiva for 7 days.
7. On Sukkot we shake 7 species - 1 Lulav, 1 Esrog, 2 willows, and 3 myrtles.
8. Yitro, the first real convert to Judaism, had 7 different names, and 7 daughters (one who married Moses).
9. Moses was born and died on the same day - the 7th of Adar.
10. Our Sukkah huts are "visited" by 7 guests - Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Aaron, Joseph and David.
11. The Menorah in the Temple had 7 branches.
12. Achashvarosh, King of Persia during the miracle of Purim, held a party for 7 days. (Esther 1:5)
13. There are 7 holidays in the Jewish year: Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur, Sukkot, Chanukah, Purim, Passover, and Shavuot.
14. In addition to the 613 Commandments, the Sages added 7 more.
15. There are 7 Noachide Laws pertaining to all humanity.
16. At every Jewish wedding, 7 blessings are recited (Sheva Brachot).
17. Each Shabbat, 7 people are called to the Torah reading (Aliyot).
18. The first verse in the Torah contains 7 words (and 28 letters).
19. Our Matriarch Leah had 7 children - six sons and one daughter.
20. There were 7 days of preparation for the construction of the Tabernacle in the desert. (Leviticus 8:35)
21. Traditional Ashkenazim have the bride circles the groom 7 times under the Chuppah
22. We wind the Tefillin straps around the arm 7 times.
23. Moses was the 7th generation after Abraham.
24. Each plague in Egypt lasted 7 days.
25. In Pharaoh's dreams there were 7 cows and 7 stalks of grain. (Genesis 41)
26. The Biblical contamination period typically lasts 7 days. (Leviticus 13:4)
27. God created 7 levels of heaven. (Hence the expression, "I'm in 7th heaven!")
28. On Shabbat and holidays, we recite 7 blessings in the silent Amidah.
29. There are 7 special species of produce by which the Land of Israel is praised: wheat, barley, grapes, pomegranates, figs, olives, and dates. (Deut. 8:8)
30. The world has 7 continents.
31. The 7 weeks of the Omer correspond to the 7 "sefirot," the 7 behavior traits in which we serve God: kindness, strength, beauty, triumph, splendor, foundation, and kingship.
32. Noah sent the dove and the raven out of the Ark for 7 days to inspect the weather conditions. (Genesis 8:10)
33. 7 nations warred with Israel: Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Amorites, Perizzites, Jebusites, and Girgashites.
34. On Yom Kippur, the High Priest sprinkled the blood in the Temple 7 times. (Leviticus 16)
35. The Jewish New Year of Rosh Hashana occurs, surprisingly, in the 7th month -- Tishrei. (Leviticus 23:24)
36. The Jewish calendar, largely lunar, has a cycle of intercalation that contains 7 leap years during each 19-year period.
37. There are 7 notes on the musical scale.
38. A Kohen (priest) should participate in the burial of 7 relatives: father, mother, sister, brother, son, daughter, and spouse. (Leviticus 21:2)
39. We dance 7 circles (hakafot) on the holiday of Simchat Torah.

40. The smallest allowable dimension of a Sukkah is 7 by 7 handbreadths.
41. The world has 7 seas.
42. Joshua led the Jewish People around the walls of Jericho 7 times before the walls fell. (Joshua 6:15)
43. Jacob worked for Laban for 7 years (twice) in order to marry his daughters. (Genesis 29:27)
44. The Holy Temple contained 7 gates of entry.
45. We recite 7 blessings every day before and after the "Shema" -- 3 in the morning and 4 at night.
46. The Talmud lists 7 female prophets: Sarah, Miriam, Deborah, Hannah, Avigail, Chuldah, and Esther.
47. A Jewish servant regains freedom in the 7th year. (Exodus 21:2)
48. We conclude our Yom Kippur prayers by proclaiming 7 times, "The Lord is God!"
49. A Jewish wedding is followed by 7 days of celebration (Sheva Brachot).

In a quick Google Search I found many more .....  
Talk to your kids and let me know your thoughts on the number seven

Shabbat Shalom,

David Bibi

PS: Back to Aryeh Kaplan and Sefer Yesirah and Yishak of Akko and Sefer Temurah – which hopefully helps my son Moses who is studying the age of the universe in school this week.

Rabbi Kaplan writes that there will be 7 jubilee periods of 49,000 years meaning the universe will last a total of 343,000 years.

Yitzchak of Akko, based on tehilim explains that one of God's days is a thousand years, as it says, "For a thousand years are in Your eyes as a fleeting yesterday." Since one of our years is 365 ¼ days, a year on High is 365,250 of our years.

Multiply that by 343,000 years and one gets 125 billion plus as the total time the universe will exist. And by interpreting the texts of Sefer HaTemunah and the Midrash, Yitzchak of Akko calculated the age of the universe to be 15,340,500,000 years old. Two figures very close to scientific calculation. What's remarkable is that 13<sup>th</sup> century Kabbalists concluded in a time when people still thought the world flat that 15 million years had passed since the big bang.

I tell Moses that one day Torah and science will be completely reconciled.

### Summary of The Weekly Torah Reading:

1st Aliya: Parshas BeHar begins with the laws of Shemitah and Yovel. The land lay fallow every 7th year, and after the 49th year, (7x7) it lay fallow a 2nd year for the 50th as well.

2nd Aliya: Hashem (G-d) promises (25:21-22) that He will provide for the nation, regardless of the land being fallow. No one will go hungry. The return, at Yovel, of all hereditary lands to their original owners is commanded.

3rd Aliya: The difference between the sale of a property in a walled city vs. an unwalled city is established. Continuing the theme of providing and dependency, we are commanded to provide for our impoverished brethren. Just as Hashem provides for us, we must provide for each other.

4th Aliya: The freeing of all Jewish slaves at the Yovel is detailed. The Torah discusses redeeming a Jewish slave from a non-Jewish owner, and the formula for how much to pay the non-Jewish master. We begin reading BeChukosai. The opening verses describe the wondrous successes awaiting the nation, so long as they follow Hashem's Mitzvos.

5th Aliya: This Aliya is called the Tocheche - The Rebuke. It is a lengthy description of the terrible punishments awaiting the nation, if they do not follow the Torah. It is customary for the Baal Koreh (Reader) to have this Aliya, and to read it faster and more quietly than the rest of the Parsha.

6th Aliya: The established prices for endowments of individual worth, or that of an animal, are listed.

7th Aliya: The final portion deals with endowments of property to the Bais Hamikdash.

Yirmiyahu's 16:19 words ring with the same urgency and fear as the Tochacha itself. Yirmiyahu was the Navi who beseeched his people to repent before the impending destruction and exile of the nation. He decried the delusions of those who used their ill begotten wealth to serve idols and foreign ideologies. They denied the benevolence of G-d and were destined to go into exile.

The acquisition of wealth through illegal means is a denial of G-d's ability to provide and protect. He who trusts in man for his strength and future is destined to be betrayed. He will be as a lone tree in the wilderness (17:6) bereft of protection or support. On the other hand, he who trusts in G-d will be blessed and secured.

Reemphasizing the message of Sefer Vayikra, Yirmiyahu exhorts the nation to beg G-d for salvation and healing, and to trust His constant love and caring.

### **EXCERPTS FROM THE JERSEY SHORE TORAH BULLETIN**

#### **“The land should not be sold in perpetuity for the land is mine.” (Vayikra 25:23)**

As I put pen to paper in my hotel in Jerusalem, my heart is filled with love of the land and its people. Praying at the Kotel with every type of Jew was an awesome experience. All who were there had one purpose – to get closer to Hashem.

There are many laws governing how and for how long one may sell a parcel of land from one's inheritance in Israel. For instance, a typical land sale in Israel wasn't forever. At yobel (the Jubilee year), all parcels of land went back to the family that originally owned them. The Torah says, “the land should not be sold in perpetuity.”

Rabbi Frand asks, to whom is this prohibition directed? The Ramban says that since the Torah uses the word “sold” in this pasuk, it shows that this law is directed to the seller. But how can he be held responsible for this prohibition? Certainly he would be willing to accept the land back at yobel if the buyer would be willing to return it!

The Ramban explains that the prohibition is that the seller may not lead the buyer to believe that he will be able to keep the land permanently. He must make it clear at the sale that the buyer will have to return the land at yobel. The Ramban explains this on a psychological level. Returning a house that one has lived in for a long time is extremely difficult. A house becomes a home, full of sentimental value.

After many years, along comes the yobel, and suddenly they have to remember, “Oh, right! This is not mine forever. I have to give it back!” It might be a great test to return it at that time. The Torah therefore commands the seller to remind the buyer at the outset that the sale is temporary. The Torah tells the seller to minimize the test placed on the buyer, to make it easier for him to observe the Torah law.

Life is full of tests. The misvot can be difficult to fulfill at times. A person should seek to make misvah observance as easy as possible for himself., just like a person on a diet should not go into a bakery while the fresh cakes give off their aroma.

Following Hashem's misvot is rewarding. We should try as much as possible to minimize the difficulty by avoiding the tests that we don't have to face. Shabbat Shalom from Jerusalem. Rabbi Reuven Semah

#### **“If you behave casually with me” (Vayikra 26:21)**

When describing the decline of the Jewish Nation after they sinned and were exiled from their land, the Torah uses the word here a few times, which means coincidence. Whenever the Jewish people say that the punishment which befalls them is only a natural occurrence, a coincidence, Hashem has to resort to stronger methods in order to show us that He is the cause of everything. Just like a father first chastises his son with a slight tap, and if there is no response has to resort to stronger methods, so too Hashem, who is our Father, “talks to us” and wants us to get the message before it becomes harsher. Whenever we hear of tragedies in our community, fighting in the land of Israel or other calamities, we must realize it is not natural, it is a message. Each one must take the message to heart and apply it based on his or her own way of life, to try to improve and find favor in the eyes of Hashem. Even when we see the weather drop 40 degrees in one day, or the stock market go up (hopefully) or down many hundreds of points from day to day, these are happenings meant to show us that there is no natural occurrence which doesn't have a Creator masterminding His plan. Let's keep our eyes open! Shabbat Shalom. Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

#### **RABBI ELI MANSOUR**

**Visit [DailyHalacha.com](http://DailyHalacha.com), [DailyGemara.com](http://DailyGemara.com),  
[MishnaBerura.com](http://MishnaBerura.com), [LearnTorah.com](http://LearnTorah.com)**

The Torah in Parashat Behar presents the law of Yobel, the jubilee year, when all servants were set free. A Jew who sold himself as a servant was offered to be released after six years of service, but if he preferred remaining with his master, he was allowed to continue serving until the Yobel, at which point all servants were set free.

The onset of the jubilee year would be announced on Yom Kippur, with the sounding of the Shofar throughout the land. The Sefer Ha'hinuch writes that the release of servants was announced specifically on Yom Kippur because that is the day of repentance and introspection, when people are most inclined to do the right thing. If there is one day a year when people feel inspired and motivated to obey G-d's commands and avoid wrongdoing, it is Yom Kippur. And thus the Torah, knowing how difficult it is for masters to release their servants, instituted that the

announcement be made on Yom Kippur, when the people are most drawn toward compliance and obedience, and most willing to make sacrifices to fulfill their obligations to G-d.

Historically, we know that this was indeed a very difficult challenge for the Jewish people. We read in the Book of Yirmiyahu that the prophet admonished the people to comply with the Torah's command and release their servants, and they obeyed his instructions. Shortly thereafter, however, they changed their minds and brought their servants back under their control. They couldn't bring themselves to continue living without the assistance of servants.

Why is this such a difficult Misva to observe? What made it so tempting for the people to keep their servants in defiance of the Torah?

The answer lies in the innate human desire for control, to exert authority over other people. Very few people could realistically aspire to formal positions of power, so they sought to satisfy this craving by having servants under their control. This is simply a function of human nature; we were created with this innate drive to control other people. The law of Yobel was instituted to rein in on this tendency, and to help temper the drive for control. It establishes that although it is acceptable to have servants under one's authority, this control must be limited, and after six years – or at least on the jubilee – the servants must be released.

This Misva conveys a very vital lesson even nowadays, when we do not have servants. The desire to exert control is the cause of many problems in relationships. Marriages are strained when a spouse seeks to exert control over the other, and children rebel when parents try to be too controlling. In friendships and professional relationships, too, the desire for control can prove very destructive and ruin an otherwise fruitful and beneficial relationship. The Misva of Yobel teaches us to give others their space and overcome the natural desire for control. We should not be trying to mold our spouse, children, friends, neighbors and associates into precisely the kind of people we want them to be. We need to learn to let go, to let people be a bit different from us, and be tolerant and accepting. Full control over people belongs only in the hands of the Almighty, and we must never make the mistake of trying to usurp His exclusive position of authority.

## Rabbi Wein

The book of Vayikra concludes with a description of Jewish destiny and a foretelling of dire events that that will befall the Jewish people. The clear message in this parsha, and as repeated later in the book of Dvarim and in the words of the prophets of Israel over the next millennium, is that the Jewish people and its behavior and society are held to a high standard of loyalty and piety.

The consequences of backsliding from these Torah standards are major and painful. God's relationship with the Jewish people is serious business and the unbreakable covenant between the Jewish people and the Creator is eternally present and binding.

Ramban and others ascribe the events portrayed in Vayikra to the times and destruction of the First Temple. The descriptions in Dvarim – which are longer and more intense – refer to the times and destruction of the Second Temple and its millennia long aftermath in the exile of the Jewish people.

Also present and implicit in the difficult message communicated in this parsha, and in Dvarim as well, is the ultimate promise of God to preserve us and not completely forsake us. All of Jewish history, even until our very day, has lived up to these forecasts and events as recorded for us in the parsha.

The Ramban counts as one of the proofs of Torah's divinity the fact that words written and taught so many centuries earlier than the actual event would eventually take place are accurate, detailed and cogent.

The book of Vayikra is replete with laws, ritual commandments, sacrificial service, purity and impurity and the technical details of being a Jew. It has very little narrative to it and it is the most scholarly difficult of all of the books of the Torah. If the Torah's objective was to induce people to a so-called user friendly faith, then this is not the book that should have been presented.

But the Torah is integrity itself. Therefore, in Jewish tradition the law demands that those who apply for conversion to Judaism should initially be discouraged and not enticed into thinking that somehow becoming Jewish guarantees paradise in this world or even the next. The rewards of Judaism are great but there are costs, responsibilities and sacrifices that accompany those rewards.

And, an awareness of those costs is necessary for true Jewish commitment. Jewish history is not to be

seen as a random occurrence of events. It is rather part of the actual results of the covenant entered into between Israel and the Creator at Sinai. Everything that was foretold in such detail and exactness in the Torah, as to what would befall Israel in its long journey through history and civilization, has in effect occurred and happened.

It is at once sobering to see how this has unfolded in Jewish life. But it is also encouraging, for it guarantees the fulfillment of the blessings of the Torah upon Israel as formulated in this week's parsha. The covenant in all of its parts reigns forever.

**Sir Jonathan Sacks**  
**Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations**  
**of the Commonwealth**

### The Chronological Imagination

I want, in this study, to look at one of Judaism's most distinctive and least understood characteristics – the chronological imagination.

The modern world was shaped by four revolutions: the English, the American, the French and the Russian. Two – the English and American – were inspired by the Hebrew Bible which in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, because of the Reformation and the invention of printing, became widely available for the first time. The French and Russian revolutions, by contrast, were inspired by philosophy: the French by the work of Jean Jacques Rousseau, the Russian by the writings of Karl Marx.

Their histories are markedly different. In England and America, revolution brought war, but led to a gradual growth of civil liberties, human rights, representative government and eventually democracy. The French and Russian revolutions began with dreams of utopia and ended in a nightmare of hell. Both gave rise to terror and bloodshed and the repression of human rights.

What is the difference between philosophy and the political vision at the heart of Tenakh? The answer lies in their different understandings of time.

The sedra of Behar sets out a revolutionary template for a society of justice, freedom and human dignity. At its core is the idea of the Jubilee, whose words ("Proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof") are engraved on one of the great symbols of freedom, the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia. One of its provisions is the release of slaves:

If your brother becomes impoverished and is sold to you, do not work him like a slave. He shall be with you like an employee or a resident. He shall serve you only until the jubilee year and then he and his children shall be free to leave you and return to their family and to the hereditary land of their ancestors. For they are My servants whom I brought out of the land of Egypt; they shall not be sold as slaves. Do not subjugate them through hard labour – you shall fear your G-d . . . For the children of Israel are servants to Me: they are My servants whom I brought out of the land of Egypt – I am the Lord your G-d.

The terms of the passage are clear. Slavery is wrong. It is an assault on the human condition. To be "in the image of G-d" is to be summoned to a life of freedom. The very idea of the sovereignty of G-d means that He alone has claim to the service of mankind. Those who are G-d's servants may not be slaves to anyone else. At this distance of time it is hard to recapture the radicalism of this idea, overturning as it did the very foundations of religion in ancient times. The early civilizations – Mesopotamia, Egypt – were based on hierarchies of power which were seen to inhere in the very nature of the cosmos. Just as there were (so it was believed) ranks and gradations among the heavenly bodies, so there were on earth. The great religious rituals and monuments were designed to mirror and endorse these hierarchies. In this respect Karl Marx was right. Religion in antiquity was the robe of sanctity concealing the naked brutality of power. It canonized the status quo.

At the heart of Israel was an idea almost unthinkable to the ancient mind: that G-d intervenes in history to liberate slaves – that the supreme Power is on the side of the powerless. It is no accident that Israel was born as a nation under conditions of slavery. It has carried throughout history the memory of those years – the bread of affliction and the bitter herbs of servitude – because the people of Israel serves as an eternal reminder to itself and the world of the moral necessity of liberty and the vigilance needed to protect it. The free G-d desires the free worship of free human beings.

Yet the Torah does not abolish slavery. That is the paradox at the heart of Behar. To be sure it was limited and humanized. Every seventh day, slaves were granted rest and a taste of freedom. In the seventh year Israelite slaves were set free. If they chose otherwise they were released in the Jubilee year. During their years of service they were to be treated like employees. They were not to be subjected to back-breaking or spirit-crushing labour. Everything dehumanizing about slavery was forbidden. Yet slavery itself was not banned. Why

not? If it was wrong, it should have been annulled. Why did the Torah allow a fundamentally flawed institution to continue?

It was Moses Maimonides in *The Guide for the Perplexed* who explained the need for time in social transformation. All processes in nature, he argued, are gradual. The foetus develops slowly in the womb. Stage by stage a child becomes mature. And what applies to individuals applies to nations and civilizations:

It is impossible to go suddenly from one extreme to the other. It is therefore, according to the nature of man, impossible for him suddenly to discontinue everything to which he has been accustomed.

Accordingly, G-d did not ask of the Israelites that they suddenly abandon everything they had become used to in Egypt. "G-d refrained from prescribing what the people by their natural disposition would be incapable of obeying." But surely G-d can do anything, including changing human nature. Why then did He not simply transform the Israelites, making them capable immediately of the highest virtue? Maimonides' answer is simple:

I do not say this because I believe that it is difficult for G-d to change the nature of every individual person. On the contrary, it is possible and it is in His power . . . but it has never been His will to do it, and it never will be. If it were part of His will to change the nature of any person, the mission of the prophets and the giving of the Torah would have been superfluous.

In miracles, G-d changes nature but never human nature. Were He to do so, the entire project of the Torah – the free worship of free human beings – would have been rendered null and void. There is no greatness in programming a million computers to obey instructions. G-d's greatness lay in taking the risk of creating a being, homo sapiens, capable of choice and responsibility – of obeying G-d freely.

G-d wanted mankind to abolish slavery but by their own choice, and that takes time. Ancient economies were dependent on slavery. The particular form dealt with in Behar (slavery through poverty) was the functional equivalent of what is today called "workfare", i.e. welfare benefit in return for work. Slavery as such was not abolished in Britain and America until the nineteenth century, and in America not without a civil war. The challenge to which Torah legislation was an answer is: how can one create a social structure in which, of their own accord, people will eventually come to see slavery as wrong and freely choose to abandon it?

The answer lay in a single deft stroke: to change slavery from an ontological condition ("what am I?") to a temporary circumstance. No Israelite was allowed to be or see himself as a slave. He or she might be reduced to slavery for a period of time, but this was a passing plight, not an identity. Compare the account given by Aristotle:

By analogy, must necessarily apply to mankind as a whole. Therefore all men who differ from one another by as much as the soul differs from the body or man from a wild beast . . . these people are slaves by nature, and it is better for them to be subject to this kind of control, as it is better for the other creatures I have mentioned. For a man who is able to belong to another person is by nature a slave . . . (Politics 1.5)

For Aristotle, slavery is an ontological condition, a fact of birth. Some are born to rule, others to be ruled. This is precisely the worldview to which Torah is opposed. The entire complex of biblical legislation is designed to ensure that neither the slave nor his owner should ever see slavery as a permanent condition. A slave should be treated "like an employee or a resident," in other words, with the respect due to a free human being. In this way the Torah ensured that, although slavery could not be abolished overnight, it would eventually be. And so it happened.

There are profound differences between philosophy and Judaism, and one lies in their respective understandings of time. For Plato and his heirs, philosophy is about the truth that is timeless (or for Hegel and Marx, about "historical inevitability"). Judaism is about truths (like human freedom) that are realized in and through time. That is the difference between what I call the logical and chronological imaginations. The logical imagination yields truth as system. The chronological imagination yields truth as story (a story is a sequence of events extended through time). Revolutions based on philosophical systems fail – because change in human affairs takes time, and philosophy is incapable of understanding the human dimension of time. The inevitable result is that (in Rousseau's famous phrase) they "force men to be free" – a contradiction in terms, and the reality of life under Soviet Communism. Revolutions based on Tenakh succeed, because they go with the grain of human nature, recognizing that it takes time for people to change. The Torah did not abolish slavery but it set in motion a process that would lead people to come of their own accord to the conclusion that it was wrong. How it did so is one of the wonders of history.



**AS HEARD FROM RABBI AVIGDOR MILLER Z'TL**

"And you should not cause sorrow, a man to his fellowman, and you shall fear your G-d, for I am Hashem your G-d" (25:17)

Although this is said in the matter of money dealings, as is evident from a foregoing verse, yet the fact that this commandment is a repetition of verse 14 indicates an especial emphasis. You shall not cause sorrow to your fellowman in any instance, even when no money is involved. "The verse speaks of causing sorrow by words" (Baba Metzia 58B). The word "Tonu" (from which we have the expression 'Onaat Devarim') is derived from 'On', as in the verse "I have not eaten thereof in my mourning ('Oni')" (Devarim 26:14). Thus we have a specific 'Lav' (negative Mitzvah) against speaking words that hurt a fellowman's feelings.

In three ways the hurtful words are more severe than wronging a fellowman in money matters.

- 1) The previous admonition (25:14) which speaks of money matters is not accompanied by the words "You shall fear your G-d" (although indeed even there he should fear Hashem). But this verse which is specifically intended for hurtful words is specifically accompanied by the admonition "You shall fear your G-d".
- 2) The previous admonition is against a wrong done to your fellowman's money, but this admonition is against hurting your fellowman personally. Because unkind words cause hurt and sometimes "there is one that speaks like the piercings of a sword" (Mishle 12:18).
- 3) A money-wrong can be rectified by returning the money, but words cannot be rectified, or the hurt is already done.

The expression "A man to his fellowman" adds to the gravity of this sin,

- 1) in the sense of the loyalty to your fellow Israelite with whom you should feel a togetherness ('Amito' derived from 'Im', 'with' or 'together').
- 2) Because of the great love that Hashem has for your fellowman (19:18).

The first of these two considerations, the loyalty to your togetherness (Amito), imposes a greater responsibility toward kin/family, and the closest togetherness is that of a husband and wife. When married persons engage in exchanging hurtful words, "like the piercings (plural) of a sword" and they cause to each other hurt, and even cause harm to the mate's health "like the piercings (again and again) of a sword", they indeed have reason to be afraid of Hashem's retribution.

"The one who is with you in Torah and Mitzvot (Amito), do not cause him any hurt" (Baba Metzia 59A).

And surely "A man should always beware of causing sorrow to his wife: (ibid.), for the above mentioned reasons and also because she is more easily hurt (ibid.)

Quoted from "A Kingdom of Cohanim" by Rabbi Miller ZT'L

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