

# Likutei Divrei Torah

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Shabbat Shalom

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## Covenant and Conversation

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

### The Limits of the Free Market

As I was writing this essay, a newspaper headline caught my eye. It read: "The UK's richest people have defied the double-dip recession to become even richer over the past year." [1]

This is in spite of the fact that most people have become poorer, or at least seen their real income stay static, since the financial crisis of 2008. As the saying goes, "There's nothing surer: the rich get rich and the poor get poorer." It is to this phenomenon that the social legislation of Parshat Behar is addressed.

Leviticus 25 sets out a number of laws whose aim is to correct the tendency toward radical and ever-increasing inequality that result from the unfettered play of free market economics. So we have the Sabbatical year (Shemittah) in which debts were released, Hebrew slaves were set free, the land lay fallow and its produce, unharvested, belonged to everyone. There was the Jubilee year (Yovel) in which, with some exceptions, ancestral land returned to its original owners. There was the command to help the needy ("If any of your fellow Israelites become poor and are unable to support themselves among you, help them as you would a foreigner and stranger, so they can continue to live among you" Lev. 25:35.) And there was the obligation to treat slaves not slavishly but as "hired workers or temporary residents." (Lev. 25:40)

As Heinrich Heine pointed out: "Moses did not want to abolish ownership of property; he wished, on the contrary, that everyone should possess something, so that no man might, because of poverty, be a slave with a slavish mind. Liberty was forever the ultimate thought of this great emancipator, and it still breathes and flames in all his laws which concern pauperism." Israel Tabak, *Judaic Lore in Heine*, Johns Hopkins University Press reprints, 1979, 32.

Despite the sheer antiquity of these laws, time and again they have inspired those wrestling with issues of liberty, equity and justice. The verse about the Jubilee Year, ("Proclaim Liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof." Lev. 25:10) is inscribed on the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia. The

international movement that began in the late 1990s and involved more than 40 nations, campaigning for cancellation of Third World debt, was called Jubilee 2000 and was directly inspired by our Parsha.

The approach of the Torah to economic policy is unusual. Clearly we can make no direct inference from laws given more than three thousand years ago, in an agricultural age and to a society consciously under the sovereignty of God, to the circumstances of the twenty-first century with its global economy and international corporations. Between ancient texts and contemporary application comes the whole careful process of tradition and interpretation of the Oral Law (Torah shebe'al peh).

Nonetheless, there do seem to be some important parameters. Work – making a living, earning your daily bread – has dignity. A Psalm (Tehillim 128:2) states: "When you eat of the labour of your hands, you are happy and it shall be well with you." Psalms. 128:2

We say this every Saturday night at the start of the working week. Unlike aristocratic cultures such as that of ancient Greece, Judaism was never dismissive of work or the productive economy. It did not favour the creation of a leisured class.

"Torah study without an occupation will in the end fail and lead to sin." Avot 2:2

Next, unless there are compelling reasons otherwise, one has a right to the fruits of one's labours. Judaism distrusts large government as an infringement of liberty. That is the core of the prophet Samuel's warning about monarchy: A king, he says, "will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive groves and give them to his attendants ... He will take a tenth of your flocks, and you yourselves will become his slaves" (I Sam. 8).

Judaism is the religion of a people born in slavery and longing for redemption; and the great assault of slavery against human dignity is that it deprives me of the ownership of the wealth I create. At the heart of the Hebrew Bible is the God who seeks the free worship of free human beings, and one of the most powerful defences of freedom is private property as the basis of economic independence. The ideal society envisaged by the prophets is one in which each person is able to sit "underneath his own vine and fig tree" (Micah 4:4).

The free economy uses the fuel of competition to sustain the fire of invention. Long before

Adam Smith, Judaism had accepted the proposition that the greatest advances are often brought about through quite unspiritual drives. "I saw," says the author of Ecclesiastes, "that all labour and all achievement spring from man's envy of his neighbour". Or as the talmudic sages put it, "Were it not for the evil inclination, no one would build a house, marry a wife, have children, or engage in business."

The rabbis even favoured the free market in their own sphere of Jewish education. An established teacher, they said, could not object to a rival setting up in competition. The reason they gave was, simply: "Jealousy among scholars increases wisdom" (Bava Batra 21a).

The market economy is the best system we know for alleviating poverty through economic growth. In a single generation - in recent years - it has lifted 100 million Indians and 400 million Chinese from poverty, and the sages saw poverty as an assault on human dignity. Poverty is not a blessed or Divinely ordained condition. It is, the rabbis said, 'a kind of death' and 'worse than fifty plagues'. They said, 'Nothing is harder to bear than poverty, because he who is crushed by poverty is like one to whom all the troubles of the world cling and upon whom all the curses of Deuteronomy have descended. If all other troubles were placed one side and poverty on the other, poverty would outweigh them all.'

However, the market economy is better at producing wealth than at distributing it equitably. The concentration of wealth in a few hands gives disproportionate power to some at the cost of others. Today in Britain it is not unusual for top CEOs to earn at least 400 times as much as their employees. This has not produced economic growth or financial stability but the opposite. As I write these words, one of Margaret Thatcher's advisors, Ferdinand Mount, has just published a critique of the financial deregulation she introduced: *The New Few*. Equally impressive is the recent book by the South Korean economist Ha-Joon Chang, *23 Things they don't tell you about Capitalism*. This is not a critique of market economics, which he believes is still the best system there is. But, in his words, "it needs careful regulation and steering."

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That is what the legislation contained in Behar represents. It tells us that an economic system must exist within a moral framework. It need not aim at economic equality, but it must respect human dignity. No one should become permanently imprisoned in the chains of debt. No one should be deprived of a stake in the commonwealth, which in biblical times meant a share in the land. No one should be a slave to his or her employer. Everyone has the right – one day in seven, one year in seven – to respite from the endless pressures of work. None of this means dismantling the market economy, but it may involve periodic redistribution.

At the heart of these laws is a profoundly humane vision of society. “No man is an island.” We are responsible for one another and implicated in one another’s fate. Those who are blessed by God with more than they need should share some of that surfeit with those who have less than they need. This, in Judaism, is not a matter of charity but of justice – that is what the word *tzedakah* means. We need some of this spirit in advanced economies today if we are not to see human misery and social unrest.

No one said it better than Isaiah in the first chapter of the book that bears his name: Seek justice, encourage the oppressed, Defend the cause of the fatherless, Plead the case of the widow... Is. 1:17

Humanity was not created to serve markets. Markets were made to serve the image of God that is humankind.

[1] Rabbi Sacks wrote this essay in April 2012. The headline he mentions can be found here: <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-17883101>

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### **Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin**

#### **Count toward Purity**

“You shall count for yourself seven cycles of sabbatical years, seven years, seven times; the years of the seven cycles of sabbatical years shall be for you forty-nine years.” (Leviticus 25:8)

The biblical portions in the book of Leviticus – Tazria, Metzora, Emor and Behar – seem to be almost fixated on the commandment to count, the commandment of *sefira*. Barely two chapters ago we were commanded:

“And you shall count for yourselves – from the day following the rest day [the first day of the festival of Passover], from the day when you bring the omer of the waving – seven weeks... until the day after the seventh week you shall count fifty days.” (Leviticus 23:15–16)

The Bible has commanded us to count each day of the seven weeks between the festivals of Passover and Shavuot, until the fiftieth day. And now in this portion of Behar the Bible is commanding us to count the seven cycles of the sabbatical years (seven times seven or forty-nine years) until the fiftieth year, the jubilee year. Clearly, there is a significant

parallel between these two commandments of counting. In a similar way, both men and women (*zav* and *zavah* as well as *nidah*) are commanded to count seven days, after which – on the eighth day – they undergo ritual immersion and purity. All of these “countings” must in some way be related.

The count from Passover to Shavuot is – at least from a clear biblical perspective – the count from freedom from slavery into the desert to our entry into Israel and Jerusalem. Yes, on Passover we left Egypt and Egyptian enslavement; however, we only got as far as the desert, with all of the uncertainties of the desert and all of the alien and difficult climatic and agricultural conditions of the desert. It is specifically Shavuot which is biblically defined as the festival of the first fruits, which could be brought to the holy Temple in Jerusalem only once we arrived at the place of our inheritance (Lev. 23:17). The Bible underscores the relationship between Shavuot and Jerusalem when it discusses the special declaration to be made by the Israelite upon bringing the fruits to the Temple altar (Deut. 26:1, 2).

Passover is therefore our freedom from Egypt and slavery; Shavuot is our entry into Israel and Jerusalem, replete with the holy Temple. This idea is even further deepened by the text of the Haggada during the Passover Seder. The Mishna (in *Arvei Pesachim*) teaches that the central part of our retelling of the exodus from Egypt is an explication of the very verses which the individual must read when he brings the first fruits; we are to explicate around the Seder table “from ‘Arami oved avi’ [An Aramean tried to destroy my forefather] until the end of that portion” (Deut. 26:5–10). However, we do not explicate the entire speech; the Haggada neglects to include the last two verses of the declaration of the one who brings the first fruits. The Haggada quotes:

“An Aramean tried to destroy my forefather; he descended to Egypt... became great, strong and numerous. The Egyptians... afflicted us... we cried out to the Lord our God who heard our voice, saw our affliction, and took us out of Egypt with a strong hand... with signs and with wonders.” (Deuteronomy 26:5–8)

However, the final two verses, “He brought us to this place, and He gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey; and now behold I have bought the first fruit of the earth that you have given me, O Lord” (Ibid 26:9, 10), are deleted by the author of the Haggadah.

I heard it said in the name of a great Talmudic giant of the last century that the reason for this deletion is that our entry into the Land of Israel is only destination and not destiny. I would respectfully maintain that the very opposite is the case. Our sojourn in Egypt and even our escape from Egypt were very much directed by God and were part and parcel of Jewish fate. Our entry into Israel, our establishment of our

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holy Temple in Jerusalem and our ability to influence the world to accept a God of morality and peace through the teachings of the holy Temple are very much dependent upon our own desires and actions. It is the desert which was a temporary destination; Israel and Jerusalem are the Jewish destiny of being a light unto the nations of the world.

That is why the Bible commands, “And you shall sanctify the fiftieth year” within the context of our counting of the sabbatical years leading up to the jubilee. And the very word jubilee is either identified with the word for shofar or ram’s horn – the instrument used as our call to repentance – or from the Hebrew ‘yovel’ which means “he (the nation) shall lead” the entire world back to God. The very jubilee year is biblically defined as a declaration of universal freedom and the return of every individual to his homestead, obvious expressions of redemption.

This march of national freedom from Egyptian slavery to security in our own land from which we must realize our mission to bring peace to the world is expressed by counting, or *sefira*. The Hebrew s-p-r also means to tell, to recount, to clarify – which is the real commandment of the Seder night of *sipur yetziat mitzrayim*. The same root s-p-r also appears in the biblical description of the throne of the divine at the time of the revelation at Sinai, which is like “the white of the sapphire (*sappir*) and the purity of the heavens” (Ex. 24:10). From this linguistic perspective, it becomes necessary to understand the commandment to count – *sefira* – as a commandment to become pure and to move closer to the throne of the Almighty. Since there is no redemption without repentance and purification, we now understand why Shavuot is also the time when we receive the Torah from God – our road map to purity and redemption – and why Shavuot is truly the festival of our destiny. We now also understand why mystical and Hassidic literature refers to the emanations of the divine in this world as *sefiroth*.

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### **Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand**

#### **The "Chok" Aspect of Diligent Torah Study**

The pasuk at the beginning of Parshas Bechukosai says: “If you walk in My statutes and keep My commandments, and do them” (Vayikra 26:3). Rashi explains that “Im b’chukosai teilechu” (If you walk in my statutes) cannot be referring to Mitzvah observance in general because that is mentioned elsewhere in this pasuk. Rashi says that the expression means “she’ti’heyu ameilim b’Torah” (that you should be diligent in your study of Torah).

This seems to be a very strange drasha. The word *chok* and the phrase “ameilus b’Torah” do not seem to be related. Chukim are those mitzvos which, at first glance, seem to have no rhyme or reason. Shatnez is a *chok*. Why can’t a garment contain wool and linen together?

The Ribono shel Olam knows. He has His reasons. We accept that. The ultimate chok, the paradigm of all chukim, is Parah Adumah (the Red Heifer). There is no sense to this law—at least to us human beings. The prohibition of eating pig is a chok. The laws of Kashrus are chukim. On the other hand, ameilus b'Torah is diligently pursuing the understanding of Torah. It is an intellectual pursuit requiring intense mental effort. Learning and understanding Torah is not a chok. Why do Chazal and Rashi define b'chukosai teileichu as ameilus b'Torah?

Rav Simcha Zissel gives the following answer in his sefer on Chumash: When the Torah refers to ameilus b'Torah being a chok, it is referring to the transformative properties of Torah. Learning Torah does something to a person. Torah learned properly changes the person. He becomes a different person. There is no other academic discipline that has this property. If a person is “amel in Physics” or “amel in Economics,” it does not change the nature of the person. Even if someone is an “amel in Philosophy,” it still does not affect his nature. To wit, there were great philosophers, who, on a personal level, left much to be desired.

When Chazal say that “you should be ameilim b'Torah” here, they are referring to this mystical power of Torah to change people. The pasuk is referring to that “chok.” If that is the case, then merely quickly “learning up” a blatt Gemara or merely being ma'aver sedra and reading the Targum without knowing what you are saying is a fulfillment of the Biblical Mitzvah of learning Torah – I am not denying that – but the power of Torah to transform the person requires a different level of learning. That is amelus b'Torah. That is shvitzing over a Daf of Gemara. That is sweating hard to understand a Tosfos.

That is why, for instance, Rav Chaim of Volozhin writes in his sefer Safre De'tzneusa, as follows: “I heard from the mouth of the holy Gaon of Vilna that many times malachim (angels) came to his doorway to offer to freely transmit to him the secrets of Torah, without any effort or intensive study on his part at all. However, he refused to listen to them.” The Gaon said “no thanks” to these malachim who were anxious to share Torah secrets with him without his having to expend any effort to acquire this knowledge.

If a malach came to me one night and wanted to share “Torah secrets” with me, I would tell him “Be my guest!” But the Gaon, who was the personification of a Torah genius, wanted to have the ameilus b'Torah. He refused to accept a “free pass” to the acquisition of Torah knowledge. That is what makes a person different.

The Taz says in Shulchan Aruch that the bracha we recite every morning before learning Torah is “... asher kidishanu b'mitzvosav v'tzivanu LA'ASOK b'Divrei

Torah.” La'asok means to be diligently involved or engrossed. The more common language would be “LILMOD (to learn) Torah.” The Taz explains the connotation of the word La'Asok. Chazal really want us to put effort – blood, sweat, and tears – into our Torah study endeavors. Only then will the Torah student experience the mystical power of Torah to transform him. This is the interpretation of Im b'chukosai teileichu – she'ti'heyu AMEILIM b'Torah.

#### The Message of Shmitta For Contemporary Society

After spelling out the rewards that come in the wake of “If you will walk in the ways of my statutes...” (Vayikra 26:3), the Torah begins the Tochacha itself with the words “And if you will not hearken unto Me...” (Vayikra 26:14). The Torah lists terrible curses that will befall Klal Yisrael if they do not keep the Torah's commandments. And then the pasuk says, “Then the land will finally have its Sabbaticals.” (Vayikra 26:34).

It seems from this pasuk that the Tochacha occurs because the Jews did not observe Shmitta (the Sabbatical year). Since the land was not allowed to lie fallow for the entire year as intended, the Jews will be exiled from their country and the land will finally lie fallow for many years, as a compensation.

Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky asks a simple question: Who mentioned Shmitta anywhere in this parsha? Shmitta is not specifically mentioned in Parshas Bechukosai – neither in any of the listed mitzvos that we are supposed to keep, nor in any of the listed aveiros that we should avoid transgressing. Suddenly, when commenting on the after-effect of the punishment (exile), the Torah comments “Then the land will have its Shmitta.” This seems surprising. The Torah here in Parshas Bechukosai never said that they didn't keep Shmitta!

Not only that, but Rashi makes the calculation that from the entire time the Jews came into Eretz Yisrael, they NEVER kept Shmitta. That is incredible! How can it be that all those years they never kept Shmitta?

Rav Yaakov has a very beautiful approach to answer these questions. Rav Yaakov says that Parshas Behar and Parshas Bechukosai should really be read as one unit. Parshas Behar begins with Shmitta and then continues with Yovel (the Jubilee year). Next it continues with the halacha of cheating (Ona'ah). Then the Torah goes off on a tangent. But we should really focus on the beginning of Parshas Behar, which talks about Shmitta and then avoid getting distracted by all the intervening topics. Then, at the beginning of Parshas Bechukosai the Torah continues, “If you walk in the ways of my statutes...,” which Chazal say teaches us “You should be amelim b'Torah.”

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In an agrarian economy (which was Jewish society – and virtually all society for that matter – in Biblical times), when you take off an entire year, what on earth do you do with your time? Remember the economy was 99% based on farming. The Torah says “stop farming” every seven years. Stop doing what you are doing. In years 49 and 50, “stop farming for two years straight.” What in the world are you supposed to do during Shmitta and Yovel? The answer is “You should be amelim in Torah.” That is why the Torah gave us a mitzvah of Shmitta.

Imagine if that were the situation today. Imagine if every seven years everyone would need to stop working. What are you supposed to do with your time? In those days, you could not even go onto the Internet – there was no Internet! What was there to do? The answer is that this is the way the system was set up. The system was set up so that every seven years, all of Klal Yisrael goes to Kollel. That is the way it was supposed to work.

The trouble is that we get sidetracked with all the intervening topics in Parshas Behar and we lose the main flow. The way it is supposed to really read is the mitzvah of Shmitta and then right after that “you should be amelim in Torah” – because that is what you are supposed to do during the seventh year. And then the Torah says, if you did not do that (“If you hearken not to Me...”) and you did not take advantage of the Shmitta, in other words, by doing what you are supposed to be doing during that year, THEN the land will take its Sabbaths. Parshas Behar and Parshas Bechukosai are meant to be read together. The Torah is saying to take off a year. Sit and learn that year. Be amel in Torah during that year. If you wasted the year (or you worked during the year), you will be exiled in punishment and then the land will get its rest.

Rav Yaakov further explains that when Rashi says they did not keep Shmitta for the whole 490 years they were in Eretz Yisrael, it does not mean that they didn't observe the law to abstain from agricultural work on the land. It means they didn't use their free time during Shmitta as they were supposed to!

What is the takeaway lesson from this parsha here in the United States of America in 2023 when there is no Shmitta, and no one is taking off a year from their work? The lesson is how to make use of our time when we have the opportunity to not work – a legal holiday, a Sunday, or whenever it is. We don't have a Shmitta but we have mini-Shmittas every week! Chazal say that we have Shabbos for people to learn on Shabbos. In America, we need to take advantage of our “Shabbos sheni shel galiyos” (Sundays).

What could be a more important message as we approach the holiday of Shavuot? Take advantage of the free time that we always have, and put that time to good use. This is what the Torah wanted out of Shmitta and this

is what the Torah wants out of our vacations as well.

## Dvar Torah

### Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

There is a most intriguing commentary of Rashi at the commencement of Parshat Bechukotai. The parsha starts, “Im bechukotai teleichu...” – “If you walk in my statutes...” and what follows is a list of promises that Hashem gives to us if we obey his commandments. But Rashi doesn’t understand “bechukotai teleichu” to mean, ‘to observe the mitzvot’, but rather, “shetihyu amalim batorah,” – that we should ‘engage in the toil of Torah study.’ So from where does Rashi know this? Let me ask two further questions.

The passuk says, “bechukotai.” The chukot are the laws or statutes of the Torah but we know from elsewhere that there are also eduyot which are testimonies and mishpatim which are the civil laws. So why here are the chukot chosen to represent all the laws?

In addition, we can question the verb used: “im bechukotai teleichu” means “if you walk in my precepts.” Walking? Surely the Torah should have said ‘tilmedu’, if ‘you study’ my precepts?

The term ‘chok’, meaning a Torah law, comes from the word ‘chakikah’ which means ‘to be engraved’. If I take a pen and I write on a piece of paper, the ink will be on the paper but not within it. However if I engrave words within a slab of stone, then the wording becomes an integral part of the substance. ‘Chok’ therefore suggests that when we study the Torah, our Torah knowledge becomes an integral part of our personalities.

Through his peirush here, Rashi wants us to know that by studying Torah we engage in life shaping exercises. Beyond that, we can interpret “Im bechukotai teleichu” as “If you walk within the study experience,” meaning that further to our study, wherever we go, we should allow our learning to influence and to inspire us. Isn’t that exactly what we say in the first paragraph of the shema when we refer to the study of Torah: “uvelechtechu baderech” – “and when you walk on the way”? Let us take these words wherever we go while we are on the paths of our journeys through life.

We therefore see how significant Torah study can be for us. But it all depends on one word. It’s the opening word of our parsha: Im. If. Im bechukotai teleichu, if you will study Torah, it’s available to one and all.

So therefore I throw out this challenge to you: Why not go for it? Why not engage with Torah? And in anticipation of the forthcoming festival of Shavuot, on which we will have a glorious festival of Torah study, please avail of the opportunities in your community. And I

promise you, it will shape your lives for the better, and wherever you go, it will accompany you, to give you lives of meaning and happiness always.

## Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

### Preventing the Fall – The Torah’s Vision for Preemptive Support- Yael Rudel-Frommer

One of the central themes of Parshat Behar is the mitzvah of shemittah (the Sabbatical Year) followed immediately by the mitzvah of the yovel (the Jubilee). Both mitzvot require the individual to act in ways that are completely contrary to his own personal interests—whether by ceasing work on the land and leaving its produce for all to take, whether by releasing slaves, or by returning land to its original owners—all for the sake of creating a balanced socio-economic system.

This uniquely precise and distinctive social system is not built on the familiar paradigm of the wealthy caring for the poor through charity. That approach, while worthy and commendable, typically preserves the giver-taker divide, maintaining the socio-economic gap and reinforcing a psychological disparity between one who lives with a sense of lack and one who lives with a sense of abundance.

The commandments of shemittah and yovel bring a new dimension, not only when compared to societal ideas external to Judaism, but also relative to other mitzvot of the Torah focused on kindness. Here, the goal is not merely to care for the downtrodden once they’ve hit rock bottom, but to prevent the very formation of unbridgeable class divides.

This unique demand is also reflected in the Torah’s direct command to the individual, when it comes to interpersonal relationships: “If your brother becomes poor and his means falter beside you, then you shall support him...” (Vayikra 25:35).

What does it mean to “support him”? Rashi explains: “Do not let him fall and collapse, making it difficult to raise him up again, but strengthen him from the moment his hand begins to falter. To what is this comparable? To a load on a donkey—while the load is still on the donkey, one person can steady it; but once it falls to the ground, not even five can lift it.”

In other words—don’t wait for an acute crisis that is hard to recover from. Help beforehand, at the first sign of decline, and prevent the deterioration.

Yoram Teahlev, in his song “Heyeh li chaver, heyeh li ach” (“Be my friend, be my brother”), wrote lyrics that portray brotherhood and friendship revealed in times of crisis. At first glance, the song’s words seem to echo the verse we cited, but upon deeper reflection, differences emerge that illuminate the elevated standard the Torah sets before us:

“Be my friend, be my brother,

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Reach out your hand when I call,  
Be my friend, be my brother,  
Reach out your hand in times of trouble,  
I am your brother, do not forget—  
Be my friend, be my brother.”

In the song, the person in need explicitly asks the other to be a friend and brother, and the gesture of friendship is expressed by reaching out a hand—after being asked—in times of trouble. In our portion, the Torah expects us to support our brother even before he sinks deeply into trouble, and even before he asks. The person in need should not have to say, “Be my friend, be my brother”; from the outset, the giver’s perspective must be that every fellow Jew, every person, is his “brother,” and he extends his hand even before the fall, perhaps even before the person himself realizes he is in need.

Similarly, Ehud Banai, in his song “Al Tifchad” (“Don’t Be Afraid”), also addresses brotherhood and support for others, but highlights an aspect which is, perhaps, more aligned with the instructions arising from the verses in our portion:

“If the moment of fear returns,  
I will come to reach out my hand.  
I will always be close to you,  
To hold you in case you tremble.”

Here, the person in need does not need to ask. At the very moment he begins to feel fear, his friend comes to extend a hand. The promise of immediate support is not lip service—the friend vows that he will “always be close,” and thus truly be able to help in the moment of need. The promised help comes “in case you tremble”—the trembling expresses fear, even before the worst necessarily happens. Hence, the opening lines now make perfect sense:

“Don’t be afraid,  
You are not alone.”

Such words truly guarantee that the person will feel enveloped and cared for, and not feel alone.

The principles behind the command to “support” your brother before he falls, and to “reset” major economic gaps before they polarize society beyond repair, require us to go a few steps beyond.

Not just to behave decently, avoiding harm to others—but to be actively engaged in meaningful help that allows others to stand as equals. Not merely to respond to reality once it reaches a breaking point—but to broaden our perspective, open our eyes early, and succeed in preventing suffering altogether.

In the time leading up to the war, many felt that we were standing on the brink of civil war—that we had reached an extreme polarization which was impossible to bridge. The war against an external enemy revealed profound displays of brotherhood not seen in a long

time, between people whose opinions, political views, financial situations, and entire lifestyles were vastly different.

The implementation of the principles behind shemittah and yovel could serve as a foundation for preventing severe social gaps and acute societal divides—before we reach a tipping point, when the chasm has grown too deep and wide to be bridged.

May we merit to actively create brotherhood, and from it fulfill the words of the verse: “You shall sanctify the fiftieth year and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants,” and may our great prayer come to pass—the continuation of that verse: “...Each of you shall return to his property, and each of you shall return to his family.” (Vayikra 25:10)

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### **Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org**

#### **Rabbi Mordechai Willig Unbounded Sanctity**

I. I will place My sanctuary among you... I will walk among you (Vayikra 26:11,12) The Seforno explains this to mean: My presence will dwell among you wherever you are, as it was destined before the [sin of the golden] calf, as He said (Shemos 20:21), “Wherever I mention My name I will come to you and bless you”. The Seforno renders “wherever I mention My Name” to refer to the houses of Hashem, such as a beis hamedrash where Torah is learned (see Oz Vehadar edition footnote 39). Hashem is saying as follows: I will not be limited to one place only, as it was in the Mishkan and in the Mikdash (as it says in Shemos 25:8, “They shall make a sanctuary for Me so that I may dwell among them”), rather, I will walk among you and My glory will be seen wherever you are. My holy upper presence (Tehillim 46:5) is wherever the righteous of the generation will be.

Elsewhere (Shemos 25:9; 31:18) the Seforno explains that the Mishkan was necessitated by the sin of the golden calf; ideally, there is no need for the Mishkan because Hashem's presence is everywhere, as the beracha in Parshas Bechukosai states. Nevertheless, even in the ideal eschaton, there will be a third Beis Hamikdash, but for a surprising reason: “the nations shall know that I am Hashem Who sanctifies Am Yisrael, as My Mikdash will be among them forever” (Yechezkel 37:28). The Malbim explains this to mean that Hashem's presence will Divine Presence will dwell upon all of Am Yisrael so much so that they themselves will not need the sanctity of the Mikdash. The Mikdash will exist only so that the nations will know that Hashem sanctifies Am Yisrael.

II. “May it be Your will, Hashem, that Your city will be built speedily in our days, and give us our portion in Your Torah” (Avos 5:30). The more familiar version of this statement, recited after Shemoneh Esrei, substitutes “The Beis Hamikdash” in place of “Your city”. The juxtaposition of the tefilla for the Beis

Hamikdash and the tefilla for our portion in Your Torah requires explanation.

Rav Chaim Ya'akov Goldvicht (Asufas Ma'arachos, Shavuus p.154) refers to the very beginning of Parshas Bechukosai, which states the prerequisite for the ensuing berachos: “If you will follow My decrees” (26:3). Rashi explains this to mean, “that you will toil in the [study of] Torah”. Only by immersion in Torah study can one earn the beracha of the Divine Presence dwelling within him. Moreover, as Tosafos (Bava Basra 21a) cites from the Sifri, the very purpose of going up to Yerushalayim is to learn to fear Hashem always (Devarim 14:23). When one would see the great sanctity and the kohanim doing the avoda, he would serve Hashem better and learn Torah. While staying in Yerushalayim to consume his ma'aser sheni, he would see everyone serving Hashem and he, too, would focus on fear of Hashem and learn Torah.

When we pray for the rebuilding of the Beis Hamikdash, we immediately add, “and give us our portion in Your Torah”, since this is the ultimate purpose of the Beis Hamikdash. Rav Goldvicht cites the Gemara (Berachos 58a) which states: eternity (netzach) refers to Yerushalayim and glory (hod) refers to the Beis Hamikdash. The sanctity of Yerushalayim flows from the power of Torah. The sanctity of the Torah flows from the inner Divine Presence (“I will build a Mishkan in my heart”) which is eternal, and thus eternity refers to Yerushalayim. The sanctity of the Mikdash, by contrast, is only the outer revelation of our inner sanctity. We pray that Hashem appear, and reveal His glory upon us in the eyes of all living (Musaf on Yom Tov), as the Malbim explains. The glory of the Beis Hamikdash is not eternal, as we no longer have it. When we pray for its return, we hasten to add a prayer for our share in the eternal Torah.

III. Next Friday is Yom Yerushalayim, 28 Iyar. I was privileged to be a student of Rav Goldvicht in Kerem B'Yavne when Yerushalayim was reunited on that day in 1967. One week later, on Shavuos, the Old City and the Kosel Hama'ravi were opened to the public. The talmidim of Kerem B'Yavne who were not in the Army held a mishmar in Heichal Shlomo and marched, and danced, to the Kosel for Musaf. The unforgettable experience culminated with the partially fulfilled prayer, “bring us to Tziyon Your city with joy and to Yerushalayim with eternal happiness.” Only “Your Beis Hamikdash” was missing. The euphoria of the event, and the miraculous turnaround from open threats of annihilation to a stunning military victory in six days, preoccupied all of us. We were taken to Kever Rachel and Me'aras Hamachpela, sites we had never expected to see in our lifetime just weeks earlier. A lavish se'udas hoda'ah was held in the Yeshiva.

It was then that Rav Goldvicht cautioned us to have a proper perspective. Surely there is an obligation to thank Hashem for the miracles,

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and to be inspired by our newfound closeness to the site of the Beis Hamikdash. However, as our daily tefilla states, and as the Seforno and the Malbim explain, studying Torah is an even higher level. It is an internal and eternal sanctity, our share in Hashem's Torah.

The Rosh Yeshiva quoted the Gemara (Makkos 10a): one day in Your courtyards is better than a thousand (Tehillim 84:11). Hashem said [to David Hamelech]: one day that you learn Torah before me is better than a thousand offerings that your son Shlomo will sacrifice before Me on the mizbeach. This demonstrates that Torah learning is a higher value than the Avoda in the Beis Hamikdash.

The heady days of June 1967 are but a memory, however glorious and unforgettable. The city and land of Hashem, reunited and liberated, suffer from terror and divisiveness which did not exist back then. The glory is not eternal.

This week's parsha begins with toiling in Torah, and its berachos culminate in the personal sanctity of Torah, which is not bounded by time or place. This week's perek in Pirkei Avos adds the prayer for our share in Torah to the prayer for the rebuilding of the Beis Hamikdash. As we celebrate Yom Yerushalayim and Shavuos, may we merit the speedy fulfillment of both these prayers.

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### **Torah.Org Dvar Torah by Rabbi Label Lam**

#### **Savor the Flavor**

If you follow My statutes and observe My commandments and perform them, (Vayikra 26:3)

If you follow My statutes: I might think that this refers to the fulfillment of the commandments. However, when Scripture says, “and observe My commandments,” the fulfillment of the commandments is [already] stated. So, what is the meaning of “If you follow My statutes”? It means that you must toil in the study of Torah. — Rashi

The way to go and the way to grow in life is to strive and toil in Torah. Rashi spells it out clearly and we can see with our own eyes how learning Torah catalyzes personal and communal growth. The operative term here is “Amelim B'Torah” to be “striving in Torah”. Unfortunately, for some people, sometimes, this expression triggers feelings of intensity and pressure which is associated with unpleasantness. Yet, Shlomo HaMelech, the wisest of all men has already told us, “All its ways are ways of pleasantness...”. Furthermore, any even slightly sensitive educator will tell us that a mind that is under pressure cannot process information. A person, a child or an adult, learns best when they are relaxed. So, how do we understand, how do we envision, and how do we practice this ideal of “Amelim B'Torah”.

The Gur Aryeh explains Rashi's understanding of the verse, "The word for "follow" here, הלך, literally means "walk," which is a strenuous activity." Fascinating to note that the word that indicates "Amelos" – "Toiling" is "Telechu" – walking/going. It does not say sprinting or flying. It speaks of walking. Walking is strenuous but not intense. It is continuous but not exhausting. It can be effortful but at the same time extremely pleasant.

Avraham Avinu was told, "Lech Lecha" – to go. There was no specified destination in that mandate. Why not? It's not about just getting from point A to point B and you have arrived. It's about going out of your comfort zone step by step and honoring the process of growth, like a train that is always arriving but never arrives. It's a journey to be enjoyed. So, it is with learning Torah. There is no limit, no stopping point, where one can say, "I have arrived. It's a process of life learning. The means is as sweet as the end, which is ever illusive.

Reb Nota Schiller pithily said that there needs to be a healthy tension between the "is and the ought". It's about direction not perfection. A violin that has loose and limp strings cannot be used to make beautiful music. They need to be taut (taught) for the music of life to be expressed.

That very much describes this ideal of walking/going continuously. Keeping that healthy tension alive while enjoying the way.

A great person said that the main Amelos B'Torah is humbling one's self before the Torah. The Torah does not necessarily settle in the mind of the one with a high IQ. It may be just the opposite. I have seen otherwise brilliant people flop and fail and grow frustrated in Torah study despite their high academic achievements in other areas.

The Talmud tells us that if one says, "Yagati Matzati" – "I struggled and I found" (Torah wisdom) we believe him. If he says that he didn't struggle and found, this is not a credible story. If he says that he struggled and didn't find it's also not believable but if he says that he didn't struggle and he did not find, about that we can believe him.

First a person must try with his own maximum effort and then the Torah comes as a gift. If it came about only through effort and force then we would be led to wrongly think "I did it". In the end we realize that it is a gift of knowledge from HASHEM for our efforts. Just waiting for a gift without investing time and energy engenders laziness, and nothing special happens. The main thing is to nullify ourselves to HASHEM and His Torah, and that's truly sweet and the ultimate in pleasantness.

I like to remind Yeshiva students, especially ones that are experiencing the extra pressure and anxiety associated with competitiveness in

learning, that they are eating ice cream all day. Enjoy it! Don't try to eat your ice cream faster and more voluminously than anyone else. Don't look around and feel inadequate because you are eating a pint of chocolate chip and someone else is finishing a gallon of mint pistachio or fudge swirl. Relish that milk and honey one delicious spoonful at a time. That is Amelos B'Torah. Savor the flavor!

#### **Foundation of Faith: based on the Thought and Writings of Rabbi Norman Lamm\***

The world was created with ten utterances. What does this teach us? Certainly, it could have been created with a single utterance. However, this is in order to make the wicked accountable for destroying a world that was created with ten utterances, and to reward the righteous for sustaining a world that was created with ten utterances.

Ten - This positive value of confrontation has been expressed in a beautiful symbolic manner by a great sage of modern times. Our rabbis of the Talmud categorized the entire period from Creation to Sinai, the revelation of the Torah, as tohu, chaos. What they meant was that the world as created by God was only physically complete but had not actualized its moral potential. It came of age morally only with the giving of Torah at Sinai. Now, what is the catalyst that helped in this transformation? What is it that helped the world overcome its amoral character and rise to the level of Sinai? The great Gerer Rebbe identifies this catalyst as the Ten Plagues of which we read today. In epigrammatic fashion, he tells us that the transition from asarah ma'amarot to aseret hadibrot was effected by eser makkot. The world was created through Ten "Words" of God, such as "Let there be light," etc. Creation is therefore symbolized by the Ten Words, and its moral maturity by the Ten Commandments. But it was the Ten Plagues that made this possible. The confrontation of Moses with Egypt succeeded in uprooting the corruption of Egypt, exposing the vacuousness of its nefarious paganism, and therefore allowing Israel to emerge from within it and receive the Torah. Without the Ten Plagues, the Ten Words would never have become the Ten Commandments.

Ten Words - Furthermore, we must be not only discriminating in our words, but sparse as well. Our words must be few and scarce. In all of Judaism, the principle of Kedushah is protected from the danger of over-familiarity. When people have too much free access to an object or a place, they gradually lose respect and awe for it. That is why the reader of the Torah will use a yad, a silver pointer. That is not used for decorative purposes. It is because of the Halakhah that kitvei kodesh metamin et hayadayim – that we are forbidden to touch the inner part of the Torah scroll. The reason for this is a profound insight of the Torah into human nature: if we are permitted to touch it freely and often, we will lose our reverence for it. The less we are permitted to contact it, the

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greater our respect for it. Similarly, the Holy of Holies in the Temple in Jerusalem was preserved in its sanctity by our tradition when it forbade any person other than the high priest to enter its sacred precincts; and even he might not do so except for one time during the year – on the Day of Atonement.

And so it is with words. The more we use, the less they mean. When our rabbis investigated the first portion of Genesis, they discovered that the world was created by asarah ma'amarot, ten "words." Only ten words to create an entire universe! And yet our rabbis were not satisfied. And so they asked, "Could not the world have been created with only one word?" Why waste nine precious words? Indeed, for with words, quantity is in inverse relationship to quality. If there are so many words that you cannot count them, then no individual word counts for very much.

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