

Parsha Ponders

Behar/Bechukosai | May 13, 2020 | 20 Iyar 5780

The septennial Shabbos¹

דבר אל-בני ישראל ואמרת אליהם כי תבאו אל-הארץ אשר אני נתן לכם ושבתה הארץ שבת ליקוק
Speak to the people of Israel and say to them: “When you come to the land that I am giving you, the
land will rest a Shabbos for Hashem”²

This *parsha* begins by introducing the *mitzvah* of the *Shemittah* year. The land of Israel is to lie fallow for an entire year, with no agricultural work done to it. The year is described as a Shabbos for Hashem. What does that mean? Rashi suggests³ that it means לשם השם, for the sake of Hashem. Regarding the Shabbos of the seventh day of the week, we also find⁴ the expression “Shabbos for Hashem”. There it clearly means for the sake of Hashem⁵, so that’s what it should mean here. The Ramban⁶ has a problem with this, since we know the Festivals are also for the sake of Hashem. Yet, we don’t find the phrase “Shabbos for Hashem” associated with any of them. Is there any other way to understand this phrase⁷?

There’s a fundamental principle behind the *mitzvah* of *Shemittah*, as well most *mitzvos* that Hashem has commanded man⁸. The purpose behind them is so that Man know that there is a Creator, who rules over him. Since Hashem gave over the Earth to Man⁹, a person over the course of their lifetime could really begin to think that the Earth is theirs. Man is the master over his domain, no one else. He’ll completely forget Hashem. Therefore, Hashem surrounded Man, all of his actions and movements, with laws and statutes to remind and show him that Hashem is the Creator. Hashem gives Man the strength to live, and everything comes from Him.

For example, someone with a field has laws which relate to its plowing, its planting, its harvesting. They can’t plow with two different animals at once¹⁰. They can’t plant two species together¹¹. They can’t harvest the entire field¹². They have to leave over some for the poor. While harvesting, sheaves that fall out of their hand need to be left for the poor¹³. After they finished, if they realized they forgot any sheaves, they have to leave those as well for the poor¹⁴. After finishing all the work on the produce, they have to separated portions to give to the Kohanim¹⁵ and the Leviim¹⁶. When kneading the flour into

¹ Based on Da’as Torah by Rav Yerucham Levovitz to Leviticus 25:2

² Leviticus *loc. cit.*

³ *Ad. loc.*, quoting Toras Kohanim to v. 4

⁴ Exodus 20:10

⁵ See Gur Aryeh to Leviticus *loc. cit.*

⁶ *Ad loc.* He feels Rashi misunderstood the intent of the Toras Kohanim (which simply says כשם שנאמר בשבת בראשית שבת לה, כך נאמר בשביעית שבת לה)

⁷ See the Ramban for his explanation of the Toras Kohanim

⁸ The Ra’avad’s introduction to his Ba’alei Nefesh

⁹ Psalms 115:16. See also *ibid* 8:7

¹⁰ Deuteronomy 22:10

¹¹ Leviticus 19:19; Deuteronomy 22:9

¹² Leviticus 19:9

¹³ *ibid*

¹⁴ Deuteronomy 24:19

¹⁵ *ibid* 18:4

¹⁶ Numbers 18:21-24

dough, they have to further separate a portion for the Kohanim¹⁷. As they sit to eat their bread, they have to bless Hashem before¹⁸ and after consuming it^{19 20}.

This is the principle behind the *mitzvah* of *Shemittah*. The Torah commands it by referring to the Land of Israel as being the land which Hashem gave us. This principle is evident from this line alone. The Land of Israel was given over as a complete gift to the Jewish people. A Jew could very easily slip into the mindset that they are ultimate masters over it. They'll forget that Hashem is still in charge, and controls who gets to live there, and who doesn't.

That's why once every seven years there's a *mitzvah* to let the land lie fallow. There will be a Shabbos for Hashem. Meaning, we will remember and see with all of the details of this *mitzvah* that the land belongs to Hashem. We're just considered hired workers for the land. When the time comes, we'll be out of a job, and the land is to remain uncultivated. Hashem decided that there will be no more plowing, no more planting. He's in charge.

This is exactly the idea behind the weekly Shabbos. It's called a Shabbos for Hashem. Meaning, Man on Shabbos is completely dedicated to Hashem. Six days of the week we're permitted to work, and we might think that our strength is what produces results²¹. Therefore, Hashem gave us the day of Shabbos. All productive work is forbidden. Man's physical strength is put on hold. It's a day of complete rest, complete dedication to Hashem.

This is the comparison between the weekly Shabbos and the Shabbos of *Shemittah*. They're both a recognition that we're not in charge. Our weekly, or yearly productivity isn't producing our results. Everything comes from Hashem. We need to be reminded that there's a Creator who rules over us. The land and everything in it are His²². They're both a Shabbos to Hashem. During both of them, Mankind is completely dedicated to Hashem.

Good Shabbos

¹⁷ *Ibid* 15:20

¹⁸ Berachos 6:1. Although blessings before eating are Rabbinic, it's a *mitzvah* to listen to the Rabbis (Deuteronomy 17:11)

¹⁹ *Ibid* 8:10

²⁰ See Da'as Torah (quoting Ba'alei Nefesh *loc. cit.*) for more *mitzvos* which encompass a person's day to day activities

²¹ Deuteronomy 8:17

²² Psalms 24:1