

RED ALERT!

B'HAR-B'CHUKOTAI

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DIVREI TORAH

- We are told that when we enter Eretz Yisrael, we should keep Sh'mita. At the end of the 19th century, at the time of the beginning of the Zionist movement in Ashkenazic Europe, a rabbinical dispute arose about whether we should observe the Sh'mita years or not. Rabbi Shmuel Mohilever and Rabbi Mordechai Eliasberg were among those who leniently felt that we were exempt, while the Netziv was among those who were strict. It was all based on the writings of the Rambam. In Hilchot Sh'mitin v'Yovlot, the Rambam stated that Sh'mita is observed in the presence of the Beit HaMikdash as well as not in the presence of the Beit HaMikdash. Those who held leniently based themselves on a Rambam at the end of the laws of Kings where Rambam wrote that the Mashiach will re-establish the Kingdom of David and rebuild the Beit HaMikdash... and restore the laws of Sh'mita and Yoveil. Maybe the first Rambam was stating that when Bnei Yisrael entered the Promised Land, they observed Sh'mita even prior to the

building of the Beit HaMikdash. But it was destroyed, and we should wait until the Mashiach comes. (Bottom line: Most common opinion is that today we observe Sh'mita, but by Rabbinic decree, not as Torah Law.)

- The Jubilee year was heralded with the blowing of the Shofar on Yom Kippur of that year. Rashi distinguished the law of Shofar on Yom Kippur with the law of Shofar blowing on Rosh HaShana which is prohibited when Rosh HaShana lands on Shabbat. (The Ramban disagrees, but the Talmud, Rosh HaShana 29, clearly states that the blowing of Shofar on Rosh HaShana/Shabbat is prohibited!) Blowing Shofar is not considered one of the prohibited works of Shabbat. Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai had instituted a law after the destruction of the Beit HaMikdash that blowing the Shofar on Rosh HaShana/Shabbat would be allowed ONLY in the presence of a religious Beit Din. (One year, I received a phone call from an Israeli cantor from a Reform Temple. He complained to me that the Reform keep only one day of Rosh HaShana. And since Rosh HaShana fell out on Shabbat that year, then there would be no Shofar blowing on Rosh HaShana in his Reform Temple. He wanted to pray with us on the second day of Rosh HaShana, and be able to hear the Shofar being blown. At first, I was inclined to permit his attendance, but

then it became clear that he wanted to be the Chazzan in our Shul for the second day. I asked whether he wanted to bring his guitar. He said: yes, if I would permit it. End of story.)

- The resounding announcement on the Yoveil was the verse: “And you shall proclaim liberty throughout the land to all inhabitants thereof...” (25:10). We all recognize this verse as it is the sacred statement, inscribed on the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia. (The Liberty Bell was originally cast in 1752 in London and shipped to Philadelphia. No one knows when it became cracked, but it was rung on July 8, 1776, to celebrate the first public reading of the Declaration of Independence.) In the Talmud (Rosh HaShana 9b), Rabbi Yehuda asked what does the word D'ROR (freedom) mean? He answered: “Freedom describes a state of being wherein a man can dwell wherever he chooses to dwell, and wherein a man can do business in every locality.” In our long history, we have learned that we cannot take these freedoms for granted. We were denied these freedoms for many years in our exile.

- The institution of law inherent in the concept of Yoveil (Jubilee) underscores the basis of these freedoms. Several laws helped us to reach and preserve these freedoms. The cancellation of all debts. Every seven years, debts were to be cancelled. In

essence all loans were, by definition, short term. Long term loans were seen as detrimental to the case of freedom. The cancellation of slavery. Slavery existed, but all slaves had to be granted their freedom. This allowed each person to start all over again. (There is no concept of declaring bankruptcy in Jewish law.) This would assist each person to crawl out from the economic hole in which he was mired. Additionally, each person “shall return to his original ancestral land”. This further enabled the economy to righten itself. These were grand and lofty concepts which were in theory to help society correct its course. Too bad they were not embraced fully in any society.

- There is a discussion among classical Poskim whether there is Ona'a, deception, in the selling of land. Ramban, in Chumash, claims that there definitely is deception in land deals. Consider the following two cases. Reuven wants to buy Shimon's land because Reuven knows the geological reports that reveal that there are oil deposits on Shimon's property. But Reuven does not reveal the data to Shimon and makes a low bid to Shimon. This is deception and prohibited by Torah law. Case two: Disney wanted to buy a lot of land in the Orlando area to eventually build Disney World. Disney knows that if word got out as to what

the plan was, land prices would immediately become highly inflated. Disney therefore created several dummy corporations to buy up the lands they desired. This is not deception; this is being wise and crafty. And this is what happened.

- In the beginning of B'chukotai, the section of Divine Blessings is too short. Rabbi Dovid Tzvi Hoffman (early 20th century, Germany) wrote that there were five kinds of blessings here: a) the blessing of the fruitfulness of the earth of Eretz Yisrael. The Ramban states that healthy rainfall enabled the inhabitants to experience abundant food, clean air, and fresh water, assuring good health. This will guarantee business success so that each person could support himself. b) The blessing of peace. This means no war, no crime, no insecurity. c) Victory over your enemies. You will be able to destroy them, eradicate them from the world. d) A flourishing economy, resulting in multiplying numbers. We will all reach older age. Economic growth that will support all. e) We will experience Hashem's Presence. All these blessings will be assured, given to a nation that can observe all of the Torah's laws and in this way be blessed with a life of stability in Eretz Yisrael. This short section of blessings says it all.

- "You shall perform My decrees and

observe My ordinances, and perform them; then you shall dwell securely on the Land" (25:18). This statement is directed to all Jews living in Eretz Yisrael, and especially to the Jews who are in roles of leadership. When everyone will observe Sh'mita, only then will Hashem bless the land in the 6th year, and it will produce enough grain and fruits and vegetables for several years. Based on a verse in the Tochacha/Admonition (26:35), Rashi states that during the First Temple, the people ignored 70 Sh'mita years (and Yoveil) and were divinely punished with 70 years of the Babylonian exile. How could that be? In the days of the First Temple, there were several righteous kings who definitely observed the laws of Sh'mita. They did observe Sh'mita, but they did not force the nation to do likewise. Because they did not exercise leadership during those years, they were all punished with the Exile.

Questions by RED

From the text

1. How often was the Sh'mita year? (25:4)
2. On what day of the year was the Shofar blown to herald the Jubilee (Yoveil)? (25:9)
3. If five of you will pursue a hundred, how many will a hundred of you pursue? (26:8)
4. In the Tochacha, the Admonition, one number is repeated constantly, as in when you perform this number of sins, there will be the same number of punishments. What number is it?
5. If I pledge to donate the value of a 74 year old man, how many shekels am I donating? (27:6)

From Rashi

6. How many Levitical cities were given to the Leviyim? (25:32)
7. When the Torah tells us not to charge interest from a loan to a fellow Jew, the Torah adds the phrase "you shall fear your God..." Why? (25:36)
8. "I will provide your rains in their time..." (26:4). When is the proper time for rain?
9. What is the biggest blessing of them all? (27:6)

10. If someone refuses to learn Torah, what is the obvious result of his not learning? (26:14)

From the Rabbis

11. What is the punishment for not obeying the laws of Sh'mita and Yoveil? (Avot 5:9)
12. What is the only law that a Jewish slave (owned by another Jew) is exempt from?
13. "My Sanctuary shall you revere..." (26:2) After the destruction of the Beit HaMikdash, how did the Sages apply this law? (S'forno)

Midrash

14. Whose responsibility was it to count annually the years leading toward the Jubilee, Yoveil?

Haftara - Yirmiyahu

15. What is the final conclusion of this "doom and gloom" Haftara?

Relationships

- a) Moshe - Eliezer
- b) Yissachar - Zevulun
- c) No'ach - Yefet
- d) No'a - Milka
- e) Moshe - Elazar

ANSWERS

1. Every seven years.
2. On Yom Kippur.
3. Ten thousand!
4. Seven.
5. 15 shekels.
6. Forty-eight.
7. To remind us not to be devious in your desire to charge interest, as in giving money to a non-Jew and have him charge the Jewish borrower interest.
8. It will rain at a time when people are not walking in the neighborhood (on Friday night).
9. Peace.
10. He will not perform the Mitzvot.
11. Exile.
12. His master may mate his slave to a non-Jewish slave woman.
13. You shall revere all synagogues and study halls.
14. The Sanhedrin.
15. Hashem will not forsake Israel.

Relationships

- a) Father & Son
- b) Brothers
- c) Father & Son
- d) Sisters
- e) Uncle & Nephew