

# MESHECH CHOCHMAH

## Parshas Behar

### Shemittah and Yovel

כִּי תָבֹאוּ אֶל הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי נֹתֵן לָכֶם וְשָׁבְתָה הָאָרֶץ שְׁבֹת לַיהוָה

*When you come to the land that I give you, the land shall rest as a Shabbos for Hashem (25:2)*

Commenting on this pasuk, the *Toras Kohanim*<sup>1</sup> writes:

*In the same way as the seventh day of the week is referred to as “a Shabbos for Hashem,” so, too, the seventh year is referred to as “a Shabbos for Hashem.”*

Anyone who reads the Chumash will likewise notice that the Torah uses the same term when referring to both Shabbos and Shemittah. Clearly, the intent of the *Toras Kohanim* is to indicate that there is a special connection between these two times. What is the nature of this connection?

The Meshech Chochmah explains. Both the Shemittah and the Yovel years involve a mitzvah to cease working the land. However, the nature of the mitzvah on these two occasions differs, and in fact parallels a fundamental difference between the days of Shabbos and Yom Tov.

#### **SHABBOS AND YOM TOV / SHEMITAH AND YOVEL**

The Gemara<sup>2</sup> notes that whereas both Shabbos and Yom Tov are holy days, the means through which those days are determined and established differs. Whereas the day of Shabbos is determined solely by Hashem, with Bnei Yisrael assuming the role of receiving the day, Yom Tov is determined by Bnei Yisrael, as represented by the Beis Din. By them choosing which day to sanctify as Rosh Chodesh, this then determines which day the Yom Tov which falls within that month will be.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Perek 1, siman 2.

<sup>2</sup> Beitzah 17a.

<sup>3</sup> The Gemara elsewhere (*Berachos 49a*) notes that is for this reason the bracha for Shabbos concludes “Blessed are You Hashem, Who sanctifies the Shabbos (מְקַדֵּשׁ הַשַּׁבָּת),” while the bracha for Yom Tov concludes “Blessed are You Hashem, Who sanctifies Yisrael and the Festive Seasons (מְקַדֵּשׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל וְהַזְּמַנִּים).” Namely, whereas with regards to Shabbos, its sanctity comes directly from Hashem, when it comes to Yom Tov, Hashem sanctifies Yisrael – who then sanctify the

It is most interesting to note that the very same distinction exists within the halachos of Shemita and Yovel. Like Shabbos, the Shemita year attains its status “automatically,” i.e. directly from the Torah. In contrast, the status of the Yovel year needs to be conferred upon it by the Beis Din. This requirement is stated in pasuk 10: “וְקִדְשְׁתֶּם אֶת שְׁנַת הַחֲמִישִׁים – You shall sanctify the fiftieth year,” and parallels the Torah’s instructions to the Beis Din regarding the establishment of Yom Tov,<sup>4</sup> “מִקְרָא קֹדֶשׁ יִהְיֶה לָכֶם – It shall be a holy calling for you.”

Indeed, this distinction is further reflected in the respective halachos of these two years. The prohibitions of Shemita exist independently of Bnei Yisrael’s actions. Even if the people did not count the years leading up to the seventh year it is still forbidden to work the land; and even if they fenced in their fields and denied others access to them, the produce of that year is nonetheless *hefker* – ownerless.<sup>5</sup> In contrast to this, the prohibitions against working the land in the Yovel year are a function of the Beis Din sanctifying and establishing it as such. Indeed, the Gemara<sup>6</sup> states that if the other mitzvos of the Yovel year – sounding the shofar on Yom Kippur, releasing servants and returning fields to their original owners – were not fulfilled, the prohibition against working the land would not apply!

#### **“YOUR PRODUCE” AND “ITS PRODUCE”**

This basic distinction is further reflected in a nuanced reading of the respective pesukim outlines the prohibitions for these two years:

- ▶ With regards to the Shemita year, the Torah states, “אֶת סְפִיחַ קִצְיֶיךָ לֹא תִקְצֹר – וְאֶת עֲנָבֵי נְזִירְךָ לֹא תִבְצֹר – The growth of *your* harvest you shall not reap and the grapes of *your* separation you shall not pick.”
- ▶ With regards to the Yovel year it states, “וְלֹא תִקְצְרוּ אֶת סְפִיחֶיהָ וְלֹא תִבְצְרוּ אֶת – נְזִירֶיהָ – You shall not harvest *its* growth and you shall not pick *its* grapes.”

We note that with regards to the Shemita year, the Torah refers to “Your harvest” and “your separation,” while with regards to the Yovel year the reference is to “its growth” and “its separation.” This shift in phraseology reflects the difference between these two years. The prohibition of Shemita applies to “your” produce, i.e., under all circumstances, simply by virtue of the fact that you own it. In contrast, the prohibition of Yovel applies to “its” produce, with the term “it” referring to the Yovel year. In other words, the prohibition against harvesting during the Yovel year is dependent on that produce being considered “its produce”, i.e. produced that pertains to the year that was sanctified and “activated” as Yovel.

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seasons.

4 *Vayikra 23:7.*

5 The point being emphasized here is that when the Torah commands that Shemita produce be “abandoned”, i.e. treated as *hefker* (see *Shemos 23:11*), *this is not to be understood as the Torah commanding the owner of the produce to declare it hefker, rather, the Torah declares it hefker! The Meshech Chochmah refers us further to the teshuvos of the Maharit (1:42) where this question is discussed at length.*

6 *Rosh Hashanah 9b, see Rambam Hilchos Shemita 9:13.*

## THE RESPECTIVE MESSAGES OF SHEMITAH AND YOVEL

This, then, says the Meshech Chochmah, is the meaning behind the observation of the *Toras Kohanim* that the term “a Shabbos for Hashem” is written both in connection with Shabbos and with Shemitah. The intent of this comment is to point out that these two times are in fact similar in nature.

The Meshech Chochmah then proceeds to explain that the reason Shemitah and Yovel parallel Shabbos and Yom Tov in terms of their respective halachos is because they also parallel those days in terms of their basic themes and lessons.

- ▶ The mitzvah of ceasing work in the fields during Shemitah reflects a recognition of Hashem’s ultimate ownership of the land. This ownership in turn derives from the fact that Hashem created the world and hence owns all that it is in it, which is the message of Shabbos.
- ▶ The mitzvos of Yovel, including releasing servants, is rooted in remembering Yetzias Mitzrayim, from which point all of Bnei Yisrael are essentially Hashem’s servants. Yetzias Mitzrayim is also the starting point for the Yamim Tovim, and indeed, we refer to all of them as “זכר ליציאת מצרים”.

Therefore, since Shemitah reflects the message of Shabbos – recognizing Hashem as Creator and Owner of the world – it likewise shares its halachic framework. Yovel, which reflects the message of Yom tov – remembering Yetzias Mitzrayim and our resultant status as Hashem servants – partakes accordingly of the halachic makeup of Yom Tov.

Thus, together with the manifest similarities between the years of Shemitah and Yovel, there is nonetheless a basic distinction between them, which, as the Meshech Chochmah demonstrates, expresses itself in the realms of halachah, *machshavah* and *parshanut*.