

MESHECH CHOCHMAH

Parshas Behar

Taamei Hamitzvos:

The Shemita Restrictions within Yovel

כִּי יוֹבֵל הוּא קִדְשׁ תִּהְיֶה לָּכֶם מִן הַשָּׂדֶה תֹאכְלוּ אֶת תְּבוּאָתָהּ.
בְּשָׁנַת הַיּוֹבֵל הַזֹּאת תָּשׁוּבוּ אִישׁ אֶל אֲחֻזָּתוֹ.

*For it is the Yovel year, it shall be holy to you, from the field you may eat its crop.
In this Yovel year you shall return each man to his ancestral heritage (25:12-13)*

These pesukim mention the two aspects of Yovel:

- ▶ The prohibition against working the fields.
- ▶ All ancestral fields that have been purchased return to their original owners.

Both of these aspects have already been mentioned in the preceding pesukim:

Pasuk 10: “you shall return each man to his ancestral heritage”

Pasuk 11: “You shall not sow, you shall not harvest.”

In this light, pesukim 12 and 13 appear to be a reiteration of ideas which have just been mentioned. What is the additional message being communicated?

The Meshech Chochmah suggests that our pesukim are presenting the relationship between the two aspects of Yovel.¹ We note that the first aspect, not working the land, exists in the Shemita year as well, while the second aspect, returning land to its original owners, is unique to Yovel. As such, we would be inclined to say that Yovel contains all the

¹ The Meshech Chochmah does not explicitly raise the question of the repetition in our pesukim, nor does he state that his explanation is as a resolution of that repetition. Nevertheless, from the fact that he writes this comment on pesukim 12-13 where they are repeated, and not on 10-11 where they are first stated, coupled with the fact that he introduces his comments by saying, “It is possible that [the pasuk] is teaching the reason for the sanctification of the land in the Yovel year” indicates that this lesson is what is being taught through the Torah repeating both of these mitzvos of Yovel.

themes of Shemittah plus additional themes of its own. However, the Meshech Chochmah explains that the essential point of Yovel is the returning of land, while the restrictions on working the land exist in order to facilitate that goal.

DETACH AND RETURN

It is not an easy thing for one who has acquired land to relinquish his ownership of it. After all, he has been working it all these years and perhaps investing in it as well. In order to make it easier for the purchaser to return the land in the Yovel year, the Torah forbids him to work the land for that year and declares all the food that it produces ownerless. In this way, his working ownership of the land is “neutralized”, and his proprietorial bond with it loosened, making it easier for him to return it to its original owner. Borrowing an expression from elsewhere in Chazal, the Meshech Chochmah states that through this, “The Torah speaks to counter the *yetzer hara*.”

The fascinating point here is that, in this instance, the antidote for potential resistance to fulfilling a mitzvah of the Torah comes in the form of another mitzvah! We may ask: If a person may be reluctant to part with the field even though the Torah commands him to give it back, how will this reluctance be alleviated by an additional command from the same Torah?

The answer is that the reluctance stems from the sense of ownership which, once it has developed, is hard to relinquish. Therefore, the antidote comes in the form of a mitzvah which *preempts* that sense of ownership during the Yovel year, not allowing it to develop in the first place.

The Torah's Blessings and their Lessons

וַעֲשִׂיתֶם אֶת חֻקֹּתַי וְאֶת מִשְׁפָּטַי תִּשְׁמְרוּ וְעֲשִׂיתֶם אֹתָם וַיִּשְׁבְּתֶם עַל הָאָרֶץ לְבִטּוּחַ.
וַנִּתְּנָה הָאָרֶץ פְּרִיָּהּ וְאִכְלֶתֶם לְשִׂבְעָה וַיִּשְׁבְּתֶם לְבִטּוּחַ עָלֶיהָ.

You shall perform My decrees, and observe My laws and perform them, and you shall dwell securely in the land.

The land will give its fruit, and you will eat to satiety, and you will dwell securely upon it.
(25:18-19)

Although both of these pesukim end with a promise that we will dwell in security, they differ in that the first pasuk states the conditions for that security (keeping the mitzvos), while the second pasuk describes the blessing that will be accompanied by that security (the land giving its fruit). Either way, the promise of security appears to have repeated, which leads the Meshech Chochmah to point toward a further message within these two pesukim. There are two things that will generally arouse animosity between one nation and another:

- ▶ Religious differences between the two nations.
- ▶ The prosperity of one nation in excess over the other.

Our pesukim address these two ideas respectively.

The first pasuk assures us that even though we will live our lives devoted to the Torah and its mitzvos, nevertheless, this will not arouse animosity on the part of the nations, rather, we will “dwell securely in the land.”

Likewise, although the second pasuk contains a promise of prosperity, it concludes by informing us that this, too, will not lead to aggression on the part of our neighbors, rather, we will “dwell securely upon it.”

ECHOES IN THE NAVI

This idea is echoed later on Tanach, where the Navi Yechezkel writes:²

וְנִקְדַּשְׁתִּי בָּם לְעֵינֵי הַגּוֹיִם וַיֵּשְׁבוּ עַל אֲדָמָתָם אֲשֶׁר נָתַתִּי לְעַבְדֵי לְיַעֲקֹב. וַיֵּשְׁבוּ עָלֶיהָ לְבֵטַח וּבְנוּ בָתַיִם וַנְטַעוּ כְרָמִים וַיֵּשְׁבוּ לְבֵטַח

I will be sanctified through them in the eyes of the nations, and they will dwell on their land that I gave to My servant, Yaakov. And they will dwell upon it in security; they will build houses and plant vineyards and dwell in security.

Here, too, we see that the Jewish people’s sanctification of Hashem’s Name through devotion to His mitzvos is accompanied by an assurance of security, i.e. that this will not lead to enmity with the surrounding nations. Likewise, the second pasuk states that although we will build houses and plant vineyards, this, too, will be accompanied by security and they will not be threatened by any aggression motivated by jealousy on part of their neighbors.

The crucial point emphasized in the first pasuk is that the Jewish people must never feel that adherence to the mitzvos will be the cause of trouble between them and other nations, while downplaying or abandoning what distinguishes them from the nations will cause them to find favor in their eyes. For it is that very adherence which is the cause their prosperity and security.

Moreover, it is possible that the assurance of the second pasuk is connected to the one contained within the first: If the Jewish people are faithful to the Torah, as a result of which they become prosperous, *that prosperity* will not be the cause of jealousy or aggression.

May we soon merit to see the fulfilment of both of these blessings!

² Yechezkel 28:25-26.

