Points to Ponder

Behar/Bechukosai 5781

**בְּהַ֥ר סִינַ֖י In the desert of Sinai (25:1) - Rashi** famously asks what the reason for noting the location of the teaching of the Mitzva of Shmitta is, when near Har Sinai. He answers that it comes to teach us that the details of all Mitzvos were given at Har Sinai. But why teach that lesson now -- with Shmittah? **Rav Yosef of Salant ztl.** explained that Maamad Har Sinai gave Bnei Yisrael the power to overcome their physical desires for Hashem’s sake. Shmittah demonstrates the same.

**אַֽחֲרֵ֣י נִמְכַּ֔ר גְּאֻלָּ֖ה תִּֽהְיֶה־לּ֑וֹ After he was sold, he shall have redemption (25:48) - Rav Wolbe ztl.** noted that Rivka needed to own the goats that she gave Yaakov to bring to Yitzchak. The Reason? One cannot violate the Torah for the benefit of a good outcome. Rav Wolbe adds that the same can be found in our Parsha too. A Jew who sells himself as a slave to a non-Jew runs the risk of Shmad. Still, we are to pay ransom but not take the slave out via force. Why not? Despite the fact that the slavery leads to a spiritual life and death question we cannot use force or deceit to obtain a desired result.

**כִּי־לִ֤י בְנֵֽי־יִשְׂרָאֵל֙ עֲבָדִ֔ים עֲבָדַ֣י הֵ֔ם Bnei Yisrael are servants to me, they are my servants (25:55) - Or HaChaim** asks why we repeat the idea of being servants to Hashem in the possuk? He explains that we are bound twice to Hashem. First, we were tied to him from birth for giving us life and then against as He took us out of Mitzrayim**. Rav Zeidel Epstein ztl.** noted that we usually interpret the Eved concept to mean that we need to work for, and listen to, someone else. But Avdus means the subjugation of a whole personality to another. For he who never had his own awareness of anything BUT the subjugation, this is a more complete process. The person does not know anything else. This is actually what Hashem wanted us to understand about the double slavery -- You are my Avadim -- both on a personal and a communal level, you’ve never known anything else. So don’t come to know anything else.

**וּמִקְדָּשִׁ֖י תִּירָ֑אוּ Fear my sanctuary (26:2)** - The purpose of both the Mikdash and our shuls is for us to set aside a place to meet the Shechina. The Mikdash is Hashem’s house where we visit HIM. The Shul is our home where He visits us. **Rav Schachter Shlita** would often note the distinction in highlighting why when determining activities that are permitted in a Shul are often based around how they would be permitted or not permitted in one’s home (See Shaar Hatziyun 151:15).

**וָֽאוֹלֵ֥ךְ אֶתְכֶ֖ם קֽוֹמְמִיּֽוּת I broke the shackles of your yoke and led you Komimiyut (26:13)** - The standard translation of the word Komimiyut is that I took you walking upright. **Rav Shaul Yisraeli ztl.** noted that this is not just a measure of height. Rather, the double Komimiyut referred to the physical story and the spiritual one. We are charged with the dual responsibility to maintain the double structure of growth. He added that we find that in Eretz Yisrael we found the breaking of the shackles in 1948 but in 1967 with the gift of Yirushalayim, with its duality of physical and spiritual stature, we were gifted the dual gift and need to appreciate the spiritual connection together with the physical one.

**אָז֩ תִּרְצֶ֨ה הָאָ֜רֶץ אֶת־שַׁבְּתֹתֶ֗יהָ כֹּ֚ל יְמֵ֣י הָשַּׁמָּ֔ה Then the land will rest for it Shmittahs (26:34)** - THAT’s the point of the Tochacha? I thought it was the opposite of the Berachos -- as if, we didn’t deserve the Berachos so we got the curses. Why the Shmittah connection? **Rav Yaakov Kamenetzky ztl.** explained that often people use excuses for why they cannot do something -- we are too “busy”. When we are given a Shmittah to have the time to reconnect to Hahem and we do not, we receive the Tochacha. The Shmittah is the sign of who we are and what we choose. Rav Yaakov added that there are 2 major differences between money and time. Time is something we cannot be gathered or saved and also it is not something you can ask someone how much of it you have. Thus, it is critical that we use what we have to our advantage when we have it.

**הָֽעֲשִׂירִ֕י יִֽהְיֶה־קֹּ֖דֶשׁ The tenth will be sanctified to Hashem (27:32)** - The Mishna (Bechoros 9:4) describes how we sanctify the 10th animal as Kodesh. Why do we utilize this extensive sytem? Why not find an easier way to declare the 1/10 as Maaser? **Rav Eliezer Gordon ztl. (Telz).** explained that when a person sees how much he has and how little he gives to Hashem (1/10) it becomes much easier to give the 1/10th.

**Haftara:**

**עֻזִּ֧י וּמָֽעֻזִּ֛י וּמְנוּסִ֖י בְּי֣וֹם צָרָ֑ה Hashem is my strength and my stronghold (Yirmiyahu 16:19)** - What is the connection here between the Parsha and the Haftara? **Rav Dovid Feinstein ztl.** explained that Yirmiyahu highlights that our nation’s security and strength comes not from mazal or natural means but rather only from Hashem. This is similar the Parsha where we learn that our nation’s successes and failures are directly connected to our allegiance with Hashem.