

Maamarei Mordechai

הסבר לפי ממש פשוט

Parshas Behar 5784

D. Mordechai Schlachter

Back on Har Sinai, Hashem taught Moshe the following.

יובל הוא שנת החמשים שנה תהיה לכם לא תזרעו ולא תקצרו את ספיחיה ולא תבצרו את ינזריה:

“It is jubilee, the fiftieth year shall be to you. You shall not sow and you shall not reap the aftergrowth, and you shall not harvest untrimmed vines.” (Vayikra 25:11).

What does “yovel” mean? The word is translated as jubilee but the word jubilee is merely an anglicized version of the world yovel (e.g. yovel / jobel / jubilee). Also, why does the Torah say it was told to Moshe on Har Sinai?

The word yovel refers to a ram’s horn. וְשָׁעָה כֹהֲנִים יִשָּׂאוּ שְׁבַע שׁוֹפָרוֹת הַיֹּבֵלִים לִפְנֵי הָאָרוֹן: “With seven kohanim carrying seven ram’s shofars before the ark...” (Yehoshua 6:4). They are ram’s horns. (Ibid 6:5). The pasuk refers to a ram’s horn when it says that after Bnei Yisroel leave Har Sinai they may come up on the mountain – but only after the ram’s horn sounds as they leave. (Shmos 19:13). This means that the ram’s horn sounds a significant change in something. It deconsecrated the mountain and it symbolized Hashem’s leaving the mountain. Prior to that, the mountain was referred to “the Mountain of the Lord.” (Shmos 3:1). The very mountain was called holy ground. (Ibid 3:5). The Torah says, before Hashem even called to Moshe, the mountain’s name was Chorev. (Ibid 3:1). Chorev means oppressive heat and dryness. (See Bereishis 31:40). Meaning, nothing else was there because Hashem’s presence resided there. From that point until the ram’s horn blew when Bnei Yisroel left Har Sinai to travel to the Land, the mountain was holy ground. Thus, yovel symbolizes a significant change. But why did Hashem leave Har Sinai?

Yovel refers to preventing a major change and keeping the status quo. The daughters of Tzelophchod came to Moshe with a question about inheritance. They are five daughters with no brothers. Would they lose their father’s lands if they married outside of their tribe? They capped their question with this: וְאִם יִהְיֶה הַיֹּבֵל לְבָנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְהוֹסְפָה: “And even when jubilee arrives for Bnei Yisroel, and their share will be added to that tribe’s portion, and it will be that tribe’s and instead will be cut off from the tribe of their father’s ancestral portion.” (Bamidbar 36:4). They told Moshe that even when yovel comes it will not help to restore their lands to their original tribe – the tribe of their father. Thus, yovel is meant to keep the status quo.

In our parsha we have many pesukim teaching that keeping the status quo is exactly what yovel is. “In the year of the jubilee you shall return your holdings.” (Vayikra 25:13). When selling land, it shall be sold with the understanding that by jubilee it returns

to the original owner. (Ibid 25:14-16). All properties of land and houses in villages return to their ancestral owners at jubilee. (Ibid 25:28,31). All servants that sold themselves to support their families or to pay off civil debts go free at yovel. (Ibid 25:40). Yovel is meant to keep the status quo so that if lands and people were sold or indentured, they return to their ancestral lands and status by the jubilee.

Therefore, there are two sides to yovel. There is the portion where the land cannot be worked and there is the portion where the status quo returns. Both are really the same. Leaving the land fallow one extra year returns nutrients to the soil so that it can grow better. Crop rotation has long been known to improve farmland and keep the land fresh for growing. This extra year every fifty years does the same – added to the benefit of the shmita. It also allows everyone to benefit from the surplus growth during these years.

The obvious question is why is this necessary? Hashem promises that those who keep yovel will eat for three years from the year 49 planting. (Ibid 25:18). If Hashem can make a miracle to feed for three years, then why not just allow the land to keep producing without crop rotation? Or why not just incorporate crop rotation without leaving every field in the entire Eretz Yisroel fallow for a year or two at a time? The answer is in that the yovel “horn” is not even mentioned here. “The straight sound of the shofar shall pass through, on the tenth day of the seventh month – Yom Kippur – the shofar sound shall pass through your Land.” (Ibid 25:9). Instead of saying “ram’s shofar” here to indicate the word “yovel” it just says shofar and it says the shofar is sounded on Yom Kippur. Yom Kippur is the day of Atonement. It is the day to return a person to his or her status quo. The person may have sinned and sullied themselves, but now they are being cleansed. Yovel does the same for the land and properties.

Shmita and yovel fallow lands must be observed so Bnei Yisroel will show their faith in Hashem. They will show that they are people of emunah and that is how they earn Hashem’s blessings and grace. Returning all ancestral properties to their rightful tribes does the same thing. It keeps peace among the tribes and resets all boundaries, borders, and holdings. There will not be a time when one tribe will own more than its rightful portion because Yovel resets it.

Yovel is also a name. *וַתֵּלֶד עָדָה אֶת־יָבֹב הוּא הָיָה אֲבִי יִשָּׁב אֶהָל וּמִקְנָה:* “And Adah bore Yuvel. He was the ancestor of those who dwell in tents and among their herds.” (Bereishis 4:20). His brother was “Yuval, the ancestor of all those that play the lyre and flute.” (Ibid 4:21). Thus, out of Cain came the forefather of nomads (a practice followed by the Avos) and musical talent; and both named akin to Yovel. Nomadic life allows for spiritual contemplation while not being attached to city-life. Music elevates the soul and can be the sound of prayer from the heart. These descendants of Cain were to his credit.

Thus, Yovel means to keep the status quo. It returned a mountain, that served as a temporary domain for Hashem, back to being a mountain. Hashem would then reside in the Mishkan instead. Thus, Hashem told this to Moshe on Har Sinai, the same place he taught Moshe about the Mishkan. Hashem indicated he would move from Har Sinai to the Mishkan. Jubilee means returning to the status quo and to keep the peace.