

Parshat Behar
Melton at Shearith Israel, May 14, 2012
JSI at Akiba Academy, May 15, 2012

- A) Sabbatical Year (25:1 – 7)
- 1) Verse 2 – The Sabbatical Year is a derivative of the Sabbath day
 - a) Shmot 20:8 – 11 – The Sabbath is between man and God; all are to rest in order to reinforce a theological truth
 - b) Devarim 5:12 – 15 – The Sabbath is between man and man; God set you free and therefore you are to set others free once a week
 - 2) Verses 5 – 6 – You may not reap or gather, but you may eat.
 - a) How so? By taking from the field only what you need at that particular time
 - 3) Verses 6 – 7 – All human beings and all creatures have equal access to the land
 - a) Economic equality is recreated
 - b) Although there is no prohibition against killing animals for food during the Sabbatical Year, on a different level a certain equality and fraternity between man and animals is created that reminds us of the situation at Creation before the flood
 - c) One may say that the six years correspond to chapter 1 of Breishit, whereas the Seventh Year corresponds to chapter 2 of Breishit.
- B) Jubilee Year (25:8 – 13)
- 1) Verse 9 - The Jubilee is akin to a year of atonement.
 - a) Society must atone for and remedy the economic inequalities created during the preceding years.
 - 2) Verse 10 – Each individual is liberated from the oppression deriving from the loss of the means of production, and is reunited with those means, which are his ancestral lands.
 - 3) Verse 11 – But the Jubilee Year is also a Sabbatical Year
 - a) When you are re-united with the means of production, you are not immediately permitted to exploit them.
 - (I) There may be a lesson here that the land is not really yours, see further
- C) Land Sales (25:14 – 17)
- 1) Verse 14 – “Shall not wrong” means shall not deceive or misrepresent
 - 2) Verses 15 – 16 – In a deep sense there is no sale of land, but only rental of the right to usage for a given number of years.
- D) Summation (25:23 – 24)
- 1) Verse 23 – גרים ותושבים
 - a) We were גרים in Egypt
 - b) The Torah commands again and again to remember what it is like to be a גר, and therefore to behave compassionately towards גרים
 - c) Now we are reminded that even after leaving Egypt and entering the land we are still גרים, we are God’s גרים, and it makes no sense for one גר to lord it over another גר
 - (I) Economic equality must be re-established because no of us are intrinsically masters and others slaves; we are all גרים vis-à-vis the one real Master.
- E) Land Redemption (25:25 -34)
- 1) Sales of agricultural land are never final; the land is always redeemable by the original owner
 - 2) Economic development may be in tension with the redistribution of the means of production; the compromise is that within the cities one principle is allowed to prevail and in the countryside the other prevails.

- F) Loans (25:35 – 38)
- G) Servitude (25:39 – 55)
 - 1) Verse 40 - Compare Shmot 21:2 – 6
 - a) Our tradition says two things
 - (I) The indentured servant serves for six years or until the Jubilee Year, whichever comes first
 - (II) Even the servant who has had his ear pierced goes free in the Jubilee Year
 - 2) Verse 42 – God has prior ownership which establishes a legal reality of freedom which cannot be contravened.
- H) Meaning and Ramifications
 - 1) See Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, Covenant and Conversation, Parshat Behar, 5770