

DIMENSIONS IN CHUMASH

BEHAR

Shemita and Yovel

וְסִפַּרְתָּ לְךָ שִׁבְעַת שָׁבָתוֹת שָׁנִים... וְקִדְשָׁתָם אֶת שְׁנַת הַחֲמִשִּׁים שָׁנָה... יוֹבֵל הוּא תְּהִיָּה לְכֶם

You shall count for yourself seven lots of seven years... And you shall sanctify the fiftieth year... It shall be a Yovel for you.¹

INTRODUCTION: ANOTHER SHEMITAH?

In addition to the shemita year which occurs every seventh year, there is another special year called Yovel which takes place after every seven shemita cycles, in the fiftieth year. In some respects, Yovel is like Shemita, e.g. working the land is forbidden. But there are also additional aspects that are unique to Yovel, such as servants going free and all land that had been sold reverting to its original owners. All this beckons us to ask: What is the role and contribution of Yovel beyond the shemita year itself which takes place every seven years? To the extent that it is similar to shemita, why do we need “another shemita year”? And with respect to the aspects where it differs from shemita, where do these additional aspects derive from?

ABARBANEL: PHYSICAL AND SPIRITUAL CREATION

A classic discussion of these two mitzvos can be found in the commentary of the Abarbanel. He explains that these two years respectively represent our recognition and appreciation of Hashem for having provided us with physical and spiritual existence.

The Shemita Year: reflects our appreciation for Hashem giving us physical existence. It takes place in the Land of Israel, which is our ultimate national location in the physical world. In many respects, therefore, it is similar to Shabbos – indeed, the verse explicitly calls it “A Shabbos for Hashem.”² Accordingly, we cease all labor on the land, in the same way that we desist from melachah every Shabbos.

The Yovel Year: is devoted to our appreciation for the spiritual existence that Hashem has allowed us to attain by giving us His Torah. This correspondence explains many unique aspects of the Yovel year:

▷ It takes place in the fiftieth year, like the Torah which was given on the fiftieth day after

¹ Vayikra 25:8-10.

² Verse 2.

leaving Egypt.

- ▷ We count the years up towards the Yovel, just as we counted the days up to receiving the Torah.
- ▷ The special mitzvos of the Yovel year are initiated by the sounding of the Shofar, reminiscent of the Shofar sound that accompanied the revelation at Har Sinai. Indeed, in the Torah's account of the revelation, the Shofar is actually referred to as "the Yovel"!³
- ▷ The mitzvos of Yovel become activated, not on Rosh Hashanah, but on Yom Kippur, which is a day of Matan Torah, as the second set of luchos were given on that day.
- ▷ All servants go free, since the giving of the Torah represents the purpose – and culmination – of our deliverance from slavery in Egypt.
- ▷ All acquired property returns to its original owners, representing a de-emphasis on physical acquisitions and giving primacy to lasting spiritual acquisitions as made possible through receiving the Torah.

And yet, at the same time as the focus of Yovel differs from that of Shemitah, it also incorporates the laws of shemitah themselves, such as not working the land. This reminds us that our spiritual existence as enabled by the Torah is the ultimate purpose of the creation of the physical world itself, as Rashi informs us literally from the beginning, commenting on the word "בראשית" – *for the sake of Yisrael who are called 'reishis' and for the sake of the Torah that is called 'reishis'*".⁴

A truly beautiful and elegant explanation of the respective roles of the Shemitah and Yovel years, both in terms of their differences as well as their similarities!

Beis Yishai: Sabbath and Sanctuary

A different understanding of the shemitah and yovel years is presented by R' Shlomo Fisher of Yerushalayim.⁵ He begins by directing our attention to the final verse in our parsha which reads:

אֶת שַׁבְּתֹתַי תִּשְׁמְרוּ וּמִקְדָּשִׁי תִירְאוּ אֲנִי ה'

*You shall guard My Sabbaths, and you shall revere My Sanctuary, I am Hashem.*⁶

The difficulty with this verse is twofold:

1. Firstly, how do mitzvos concerning the Shabbos and the Mishkan form the conclusion of our parsha, which has not dealt with these topics, but has rather been devoted to a discussion of shemitah and yovel?
2. More perplexingly, this entire verse has already appeared verbatim earlier in Chumash Vayikra. To what end is it stated again?

It is undoubtedly for this reason that the Ibn Ezra explains that the verse contains no repetition, for it is not referring to Shabbos and the Mishkan. Rather, he explains that "My Sabbaths" refers to the shemitah years, and "My Sanctuary" refers to the Yovel year – the topics of our parsha!

Now, it is easy to understand how "My Sabbaths" denotes the shemitah year, as this is what the Torah itself has called it in the opening verse of the parsha.

But why is the Yovel year called "My Sanctuary"?

3 Shemos 19:13.

4 Bereishis 1:1 s.v. *Bereishis*. See also *ibid.* verse 31 s.v. *yom*, with commentary of Gur Aryeh, and Introduction of Netziv to Haamek Davar, Chumash Shemos.

5 Beis Yishai, drush 1.

6 26:2.

THE TWO DESIGNATIONS OF THE LAND OF ISRAEL

Rav Fisher explains that there are, in fact, two aspects to the sanctity of the Land of Israel:

- ▷ The first aspect derives from the land as the inheritance of the Jewish people. This aspect is uniform throughout the land, and expresses itself in land-based mitzvos such as terumah, maaser, leaving portions of the harvest for the poor, as well as the shemita year.
- ▷ The second aspect derives from the land as the surroundings of – and setting for – the Divine Presence which was housed, first in the Mishkan, and later in the Beis Hamikdash. In the same way that the courtyard of the Beis Hamikdash, while not the building itself, enjoys sanctified status on account of it being Temple grounds, so too, in a more expanded way, the entire land of Israel has the designation and sanctity of “Temple grounds.”

ROOTS: YITZCHAK AND THE LAND OF ISRAEL

In the beginning of Parshas Toldos,⁷ the Torah relates how there was a famine in the land of Canaan, and Yitzchak planned to go down with his family to Egypt, as his father did, until the famine abated. However, Hashem appeared to him and instructed him not to leave the land of Canaan. Rashi explains:⁸

אל תרד מצרימה, שאתה עולה תמימה ואין חוצה לארץ בדאי לך

Do not go down to Egypt: for you are a perfect complete offering, and the land outside of Israel is not appropriate for you.

Rabbeinu Eliyahu Mizrachi, foremost commentator on Rashi, adds the following words of explanation:

For he [Yitzchak] was sanctified as the category of offerings known as holy of holies, and the entire land of Israel was considered for him as the courtyard of the temple, while all other lands were considered as outside the courtyard, such that an offering would be disqualified if it was taken out.

It is fascinating to see the concept of the land of Israel as “Temple Grounds” express itself at this early stage in our history in such a unique and profound manner, regarding Yitzchak who had himself assumed the conceptual status of an offering of the Beis Hamikdash.

DE-MYSTIFYING A MISHNAH

This idea will explain to us a most intriguing Mishnah in the first chapter of Maseches Keilim⁹ which lists ten ascending levels of sanctity, beginning with the land of Israel generally, and culminating in the Kodesh Hakodashim (Holy of Holies) inside the Sanctuary. With regards to the first level, of the land of Israel, the Mishnah states that this sanctity is expressed in the fact that only from there can one bring the grain needed for the *Omer* and *Shtei Halechem* offerings, as well as fruit for Bikkurim. Many commentators wonder: Are these the only points of difference between the land of Israel and other lands? What about the well-known mitzvos of Terumah, maaser etc.?

Rather, the topic of the Mishnah is specifically the sanctity of the land as derives from it being the setting of the Beis Hamikdash. Therefore, the distinct elements that are mentioned are those that relate to the Beis Hamikdash, namely, the eligibility of bringing produce required for the *omer* and *shtei halechem* offerings.

⁷ Bereishis 26:1-2.

⁸ Verse 2 s.v. *al*.

⁹ Mishnah 6-9.

Indeed, this idea of two aspects of sanctity of the land is further illustrated by considering a territory that contains the first aspect, but not the second – namely, the east side of the Jordan River. On the one hand, with some of the tribes having settled there, it reflects an expansion of their inheritance, so that the land-based mitzvos of terumah and maaser etc. apply there on a Torah level. However, that territory does not constitute the setting of the Beis Hamikdash, so that it would not be eligible to provide the grain for the korbanos mentioned in the Mishnah.¹⁰

Bearing all this in mind, we can now understand why the Yovel year is referred to as “My Sanctuary.” For the shemittah and Yovel years reflect these two elements of the land’s sanctity:

The Shemittah Year: relates to the land as something that has been given to us by Hashem. In order to remind us of this fact, it was given with the proviso that we refrain from work every seventh year.

The Yovel Year: relates to the land as the setting for the sanctuary. In this respect, the land of Israel is ultimately viewed as Hashem’s land, as surely as the Sanctuary is His house. In the face of this reality, all acquired ownership of the land effectively ceases at the onset of the Yovel year. Additionally, all ownership of servants expires in this year, for the land of Israel as the expanded setting of the Beis Hamikdash – the center of Divine Service – dictates that our designation as Hashem’s servants be exclusive and absolute. Additionally, perhaps this is also why the laws of Yovel are activated on Yom Kippur, for it is the one day in the year when a representative of the Jewish people enters the Holy of Holies – the location that enjoys the highest level of sanctity, and around which the additional nine levels extend to the entire land of Israel!

¹⁰ In fact, there are certain commentators who argue that Bikkurim should not be mentioned in the Mishnah, since it is not an offering. However, Rav Fisher explains that, in fact, bikkurim combine both elements. In terms of their sanctity, they are similar to Terumah, representing the land as the inheritance of Israel. However, unlike terumah, which can be given to – or collected by – a Kohen in any location in the country, Bikkurim specifically have to be taken to the Beis Hamikdash, brought near to the mizbeyach, and given to the Kohen there, reflecting an aspect of korbanos within the mitzvah. As such, they too are relevant to the Mishnah’s Beis Hamikdash related discussion.