Jewish Tribune – Behar

**Yearning for Yovel**

Our parsha begins with HKBH commanding Moshe Rabbeinu about shemitah and yovel. Every seventh year is a shemitah year when it is forbidden to work the land. After seven sets of seven years, a yovel year is proclaimed by a blast of the shofar.

In this fiftieth yovel year, in addition to all the shemitah laws, all slaves are set free, and all land reverts to their original owners.

The possuk (Vayikra 25,10) says:

וְקִדַּשְׁתֶּם אֵת שְׁנַת הַחֲמִשִּׁים שָׁנָה וּקְרָאתֶם דְּרוֹר בָּאָרֶץ לְכָל יֹשְׁבֶיהָ יוֹבֵל הִוא תִּהְיֶה לָכֶם וְשַׁבְתֶּם אִישׁ אֶל אֲחֻזָּתוֹ וְאִישׁ אֶל מִשְׁפַּחְתּוֹ תָּשֻׁבוּ

And you shall sanctify the fiftieth year and proclaim freedom [for slaves] throughout the land for all who live on it. It shall be a jubilee for you, and you shall return, each man to his property, and you shall return, each man to his family.

In his sefer Derash Dovid, Rav Dovid Hofstedter, the remarkable Canadian philanthropist and founder of Dirshu, asks four pointed questions:

1. If this mitzvah applies only to Jewish slaves, why does the Torah say: “דְּרוֹר בָּאָרֶץ לְכָל יֹשְׁבֶיהָ”, “proclaim freedom for all its inhabitants”?

2. Another difficulty is that Chazal derive from this possuk that the rule of setting slaves free, only applies when most of Klal Yisroel live in Eretz Yisroel. Why is this?

3. Furthermore, Chazal teach that slaves only go free after the shofar is blown on Yom Kippur. What is the connection between the mitzvah of setting the eved ivri free and Yom Kippur?

4. Finally and most puzzling is the fact that the slave stops serving at Rosh Hashonoh. Nevertheless, he remains in his master’s house “eating and drinking with a crown on his head” (Rosh Hashana 8b) until Yom Kippur. Why does he not go free on Rosh Hashonoh and is instead fed and lauded for 9 days?

To answer these questions, Rav Hofstedter explores the mitzvah of setting a slave free. For the master, his superiority over the slave is practically ingrained in his soul. Conversely, the slave views himself as totally subservient to his master and depends completely on him for basic needs. When he is set free, he must learn to be dependent only on Hashem.

This helps answer why he does not go free on Rosh Hashonoh. These ten days are a crash course for him to realise that he is free. In the very place he had been a slave, he now behaves as a lord “with his crown on his head.” The master must realise that all creations are the handiwork of Hashem and no man should feel superiority over another.

Rambam wrote that Beis Din must blow the shofar in the yovel year, on Yom Kippur, to announce that all slaves are free. Every individual is likewise obligated to blow the shofar so that all of Klal Yisroel realise they are Hashem’s slaves. This answers why the possuk says “for all its inhabitants” - it is a call for the whole nation to know that Hashem is master of the world.

Therefore, Yom Kippur is the ideal day for freeing slaves as it is easiest for a person to pronounce himself nothing but a servant.

With this idea, Rav Hofstedter explains why the obligation is only when we are mostly in Eretz Yisroel. When we are in exile, the harsh persecution itself brings us to Hashem. However, when we are comfortably independent in our holy land, we are faced with the challenge of feeling self-sufficient. Only then Hashem commanded us to free our slaves to remind us Hashem is the master.

Parshas Behar and the message of shemitah, yovel and the call of the shofar is an important reminder that HKBH runs the world and that is an important and comforting message in our fractious world.

**Rabbi Golker is the Menahel of Hasmonean High School. To listen to his shiurim, go to TorahAnytime.com or JewishPodcasts.Org**