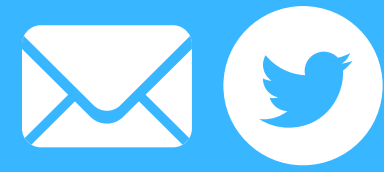




PARSHA PAGES



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Created by Adele Nemirov

● BEHAR BECHUKOSAI - בהר בחוקותי ●

WHAT HAPPENS IN THIS WEEK'S PARSHA?

Parshas Behar begins with Hashem speaking to Moshe on **Har Sinai** and commanding the Jews to keep **Shemita**, letting the land of Israel lie fallow every 7 years. In the Shemita year, the people can eat what the land produces but cannot work the land. Hashem also commands the Jews to observe a **Yovel** year at the end of 7 cycles of **Shemita**. In that year, all land is returned to its original owners, and the Jews cannot work the land. When selling land to one another, one must calculate the value based on the Yovel. If the Jews follow the Torah, then they will have enough food, even in the Shemita year, and live securely in the land. In the sixth year, Hashem will bless the Jews with triple produce to last until the end of the eighth year. The Torah teaches the laws of a property that cannot be paid for after a sale. The tribe of **Levi**, who lived in specific cities, own their property forever. Hashem prohibits the Jews from taking **interest** in any deal with another Jew. A debtor cannot be taken as a slave, but becomes a hired servant for the creditor and released in **6 years** or in the **Yovel** year, and cannot be treated unkindly. The Jews are allowed to have slaves from the non-Jewish nations of the land of Israel. A Jew who becomes a slave to a non-Jew can be redeemed by a family member or can work until the **Yovel** year when he must go free as the Jews are only meant to serve Hashem. Hashem prohibits making idols and reminds the Jews to keep **Shabbos** and respect the **Mikdash**. In **Parshas Bechukosai** Hashem promises the Jews that if they keep His laws and commandments, there will be adequate rain, successful harvests, peace from wild animals and enemy attacks, victory in war, the Jews will be fruitful and multiply, and Hashem will be present among them. However, if they reject the Torah, Hashem will turn His back on the Jews and they will become sick, lack food, be attacked and defeated by their enemies, be unable to successfully work the land, and be attacked by wild animals. If they still do not keep the Torah, their society will be destroyed as the other nations conquer them, where they will find a desolate land and scatter the Jewish people throughout the world. While the land is empty, it will make up for the **Shemita** years that were not observed. As the Jews realize their mistake, they will return to Hashem and He will remember His covenant with **Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov**, and return to them. Hashem teaches Moshe the laws of consecrating oneself, another person, an animal, a house, or land to the **Mikdash**, and the process for redeeming the consecrated thing based on its value. The firstborn of an animal cannot be consecrated, because it already belongs to Hashem. Ten percent of produce or animals, **Maaser**, also belongs to Hashem and is given to the **Mikdash**. The Parsha concludes that these are the laws that Hashem gave Moshe to teach the Jews on Mount Sinai.

THINK ABOUT IT:

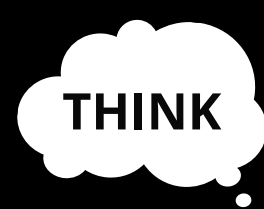
A Jew cannot take **interest** in a business deal with another Jew. What do you think is the reason for this law? If you lent your sibling or child money, would you charge them interest? Why? Why not?



THE COMMANDMENT OF SHEMITA

When Hashem commands the Jews to keep **Shemita** and not work the land of Israel every **7 years**, He promises that, in the **6th year**, the land will give them enough produce to last until the end of the **8th year**! However, one of the reasons that the Jewish people may be exiled is if they do not keep the Shemita year. **Rashi** (1040-1105) asks why **Shemita** is specifically mentioned to be given as a commandment at **Har Sinai**. He explains this teaches us that every commandment and all of its details were given on Har Sinai. **Or HaChaim** (1696-1743, Morocco & Israel) teaches that Shemita and the laws of living in the land of Israel are the **reason** for giving us the Torah at Har Sinai. Without fulfilling the commandments of the Torah, the Jews would not be able to live in the land of Israel, as we learn in **Parshas Bechukosai**.

וְצִוִּיתִי אֶת־בְּרַכְתִּי לָכֶם
בְּשָׁנָה הַשְּׁשִׁית וְעָשַׂת
אֶת־הַתְּבוּאָה לְשָׁלֹשׁ
הַשָּׁנִים: (ויקרא כה:כא)
I will ordain My blessing
for you in the 6th year
so that it shall yield
enough crop for 3 years.



Do you think that **Shemita** is a hard commandment to keep? Why? Why not? In the **Shemita** year, Jews were also required to forgive any financial debts and their property was considered ownerless, so anyone could come and take crops. What lessons can we learn from these commandments?



IS SLAVERY A TORAH VALUE?

In modern times, the idea of slavery is seen as a violation of the rights of a person. The Torah describes two types of slaves: a non-Jewish slave, and a Jewish slave, or **Eved Ivri**. The laws of an **Eved Ivri** are very strict: an individual becomes an **Eved Ivri** in specific, and rare, circumstances, such as being unable to repay damages or an object that he stole. The **Eved Ivri** was taken in by the family and treated as an equal - the slavemaster was not even allowed to change the **Eved Ivri**'s profession! The **Eved Ivri** would go free after **6 years** or in the **Yovel** year, whichever came first. **Rav Kook** (1865-1935, Israel) explains that an **Eved Ivri** is very similar to a hired employee, and does not consider it to be immoral. **Rambam** (1138-1204, Spain & Egypt) explains that the Torah only allowed slavery (of both types) because it would have been too great of an adjustment for the Jews of that time to abolish it. However, it is not an ideal way of life.

DISCUSS:

The system of an **Eved Ivri** was often used for people who had committed interpersonal financial crimes. How does this system compare to jail? Which do you think is more ideal?

