



Parshat Behar/Bechukotai, May 6 2021

The Week in Review

by Sylvie Fischhoff

New Rochelle, NY

Frisch

After finishing a long week with the high of our Eilat trip followed by the terrible tragedy in Meron, we were very prepared to dive right back into our learning and class schedule this week. It was Shabbat Ramim for Rav Brofsky's class this past Shabbat and they had an array of amazing speakers, followed up by a tour of Alon Shvut.

This week began with our participation in the funeral of Donny Morris z"l as we watched the eulogies and took inspiration from his life, so tragically cut short.

This Sunday also kicked off our Volozhin week, dedicated in Donny's memory. There wasn't an hour this week where the Beit Midrash was empty! In addition, our learning for each day has commemorated a different group of victims of the tragedy at Meron.

We also had a blood drive on Sunday - people from all over helped make the blood drive a huge success. There were 67 units of blood donated! That night we also joined the Gift of Life registry to see if we could possibly become a bone marrow donor.

Tuesday morning we had the privilege of hearing a shiur from Rav Shlomo Riskin, the founder of Ohr Torah Stone among many other accomplishments. Daf yomi also finished the third perek of Chagiga! A group of us also went to help out at the community garden with Darkaynu.

The rest of the week was learning as usual, starting to prepare for our shiurim on Shavuot, and finishing up Volozhin week with Elisheva's siyum on all of Tanach and all-night Mishmar! We look forward to Shabbat Ramim at Rabbanit Dena's and Rav Yoni's homes.



Shiur with Rabbi Riskin



Matmidot visit to Rav David Stav



Mazal tov to Daf
Yomi on finishing
the 3rd perek of
Chagiga!



Volozhin Week...



2021/5/6



ISP chavruta on Sefer Tehillim



Challah baking in
Women and Halacha class



late-night
learning...

Elisheva's
Siyum on Tanach!



Chavruta with a friend from
the Hadas program



D'var Torah from our Students

Chloe Ackermann

Strasbourg

Lycée international des Pontonniers

This week's parasha is Behar-Bechukotai. Behar opens up with the obligation for the Bnei Israel to keep shmita once they reach the land that God is giving them. During a shmita year, as taught in the Torah, one cannot plow his or her field or sow it, and whatever grows in it is left for everybody to take from. Loans also get canceled.

As I was reading about this concept, to which I had never paid the attention it deserved before, a question struck me:

Why does mitsvat shmita only apply to Eretz Israel? Why not to the whole world, or wherever Jews can be found?

Of course, the land of Israel holds a special place in Tanach and within Judaism; but doesn't shmita teach us behaviours and principles that are valuable for any Jew, whether they reside in or out of Israel?

To answer those questions, one needs to examine the following:

What is the purpose of shmita? What's its meaning?

One possibility is that not being able to work our own fields for a whole year increases our awareness of our place on Earth; as God Himself puts it a few lines later, relating to yovel:

וְהָאָרֶץ לֹא תִמְכַּר לְצִמְתָּת כִּי־לִי הָאָרֶץ כִּי־גֵרִים וְתוֹשָׁבִים אַתֶּם עִמָּדִי.

“But the land must not be sold beyond reclaim, for the land is Mine; you are but strangers resident with Me.” As the Bnei Israel can't rely on their harvest to provide food for their families and themselves during that year, God promises in pasuk כֹּא to multiply the produce of the sixth year by three, reinforcing the idea of the shmita being a reminder of God's almightiness and our dependence on Him.

Shmita also holds an important social dimension, as it places people of different social classes on a same level: rich owners get their agricultural properties taken away from them for a year, and everybody including the poor can help themselves from what they can find in the fields, owners and

workers alike, as it says, pasuk 1:

וְהִיְתָה שַׁבַּת הָאָרֶץ לָכֶם לְאֹכְלָהּ לֶן וּלְעִבְדָּהּ וּלְאִמָּתָהּ וּלְשִׁכְיָרָהּ וּלְתוֹשֶׁבֶת הַגֵּרִים עִמָּךְ.

It is interesting to note that Rashi interprets the words וּלְתוֹשֶׁבֶת לְשִׁכְיָרָהּ as describing אֶף הַגֵּוִים, even the people from other nations; fields then become a place of both social and cultural confluence. The cancelation of the loans adds to the breaking of social norms: shmita allows, to a certain extent, the reduction of inequalities and the redistribution of wealth.

Rav Shmuel David Lutzato explains in his פירוש על חמישה חומשי תורה that shmita leads the inhabitants of a land to relate to it in a different way. By allowing the land to rest on the seventh year, they consecrate the land, which leads them to watch their actions and behaviours more closely than they normally would (קדושת הארץ היתה סיבה חזקה להרחיק את העם מלטמאה ומלחללה במעשים) (“מתועבים”).

It seems to me that all of the above would also prove useful to the Jews in chuts la'arets. Why is the mitsva of shmita specific to the land of Israel?

Here are a few possible answers:

Maybe that mitsva is practically too hard to apply to a land where Jews don't have sovereignty. How would it work economically? This explanation, though, implies that shmita requires a Jewish society to be applicable - and is not bound to a specific land.

Could we then argue that people in galut are in lesser need of a reminder of God's almightiness? In the midbar, it might have been less easy to forget about our reliance upon God when miracles such as the man and the amudei esh and amudei anan were part of one's everyday life; but this argument is less convincing nowadays.

Another possibility, suggested by Rabbanit Sally, is that shmita is closely linked to yovel, which consists among other things in the return of the pieces of land to their original owner, according to the way the tribes first inherited them. If shmita is – indirectly - a matter of inheritance, it definitely cannot be implemented outside of the land of Israel.

As next year is a shmita year, I'd like to conclude with an open question:

With progress came a modification of the functioning of society, for example regarding the proportion of workers in each sector of activity. Bnei Israel and their contemporaries were a nation of farmers and cattle breeders. Nowadays, only a very small portion of society works in the

agricultural field. Our rapport to the land has therefore changed, and we don't relate to nature the same way our ancestors did.

Moreover, Rav Kook's heter mechira, even if undoubtedly necessary to maintain the economy during shmita years, has also played a role in making shmita less present in our lives: it is not really a year of שבת הארץ anymore, except on an individual level for the owners of gardens; it is less of a year of equality and redistribution.

What, then, is shmita about nowadays? What does it mean to us in a contemporary context?

Wishing you a nice end of the week (and happy to hear any idea of answer)

